

## CSS MEDIATION RESOURCES

# Peace Agreements and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): Insights from the Central African Republic and Libya

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# **Peace Agreements and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR): Insights from the Central African Republic and Libya**

Silke Rusch



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# Summary

Based on first hand field experience with the UN in Africa, this paper aims to analyze how third parties engage armed groups in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements that include Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) provisions. The paper specifically focuses on this question in extremely fragile contexts, where the state's institutions are weak and non-state armed groups control large territories and natural resources. Examples include the Central African Republic (CAR) and Libya, two cases we study in this paper. The paper then explores ways forward, highlighting the need for contextualized and inclusive negotiations along with the development of governance capacity linking the local and national level.

The implementation of peace agreements in fragile contexts is extremely challenging. There are various reasons for this, including difficulties related to contextualizing peace agreements, ensuring inclusivity in negotiations or governance capacity to implement agreements. Parties may also sign an agreement because they are pressured to do so, or they see an advantage in signing an agreement, even if they are unsure what it entails or if they will implement it. In some contexts, the discrepancy between the content of a signed agreement and the parties' lack of willingness to implement it has led to a failure of multiple peace agreements, each followed by a return to violent fighting and sometimes civil war.

A further challenge in peace processes in fragile contexts derives from the state-centric peacebuilding paradigm used in a number of cases. DDR provisions in peace agreements are generally part of this approach. Yet as the CAR and Libya case studies show, there are limitations to this approach in situations of asymmetric power and military balance between the state and non-state armed groups. One reason for this is that the processes leading up to these agreements often only provide for limited representation of armed groups and marginalized populations, in particular in power- and wealth-sharing negotiations. Another reason is that the processes often fail to acknowledge the many steps needed for legitimate and effective state governance to form. Armed groups who feel marginalized in peace talks and perceive that their grievances or those of communities in areas under their control are not being sufficiently discussed are therefore unlikely to disarm or engage in the peace process in a constructive manner. The central state, on the other side, often has insufficient capacity and presence across the country

to take over control from the armed groups. Although state-centric agreements generally assume that the state will be able to establish and preserve the monopoly of force after an agreement has been signed, such states' limited capacity makes this highly unlikely, at least in the short to medium term, as the cases of the CAR and Libya show.

UN peace operations often engage in such complex situations as a key partner of national governments in trying to implement DDR, as well as other programs such as Community Violence Reduction (CVR). Based on decades of experience in DDR implementation, the UN's main policy document on DDR, the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), states what makes a context adapted for DDR. These preconditions for effective DDR implementation underline the voluntary nature of the program. By laying down their weapons, armed groups give up their leverage and their means to defend any communities that may rely on them. They will only consent to such a step if a peace agreement credibly promises to satisfy their demands. This highlights the close link between the negotiations, content, and implementability of a peace agreement.

Over the past few years, the response chosen by UN peace operations to implementing DDR provisions in such contexts has been to design bottom-up approaches to stabilize the security situation at the local level. This has led to the emergence of CVR and local mediation initiatives that today attract more donor funding than traditional DDR programs. However, as the experiences made in CVR implementation in this paper show, a pure bottom-up approach to peacemaking is not sustainable in the medium to long term. It may lead to a disconnect between local-level engagement and national-level peace talks, which may undermine the trust of local populations and armed groups in the peace process and may end up creating more divisions.

Reversing this dynamic requires an approach that specifically addresses the complex relationships between armed groups, communities, and the state, and carefully sequences different phases of a peace process in a context-sensitive matter. To this end, the implementation of traditional DDR programs needs to be preceded by governance building initiatives that progressively reintroduce the central state into armed group controlled territory by combining center-outwards, top-down, and bottom-up approaches. Different options may be explored that focus on service provision to the local population through local governance structures, composed of representatives of communities, armed groups, and the central state. This has to be negotiat-

ed and takes time. The shape such initiatives take and how they are negotiated will depend on the context and the phase of the peace process – thus the need for ongoing and in-depth conflict analysis. What is important is that these initiatives are linked to national-level peace processes through an effective reporting mechanism.

The analysis and reflections presented here for discussion are based on first-hand experience and insights of practitioners working in UN missions in the CAR and Libya and at the UN headquarters in New York. The paper primarily addresses UN member states who are supporting mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding processes. It is also meant as food for thought for the broader peacemaking community, as well as those actors that ultimately matter the most: people and parties to a conflict.



# Foreword

For 35 years, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of fighting forces has been an essential part of UN-led peace negotiations. Whereas guidance on how to design and implement DDR processes was enshrined in the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), similar support for mediators and other third parties supporting the development of peace agreements including DDR clauses has lagged behind. This publication goes a way to filling that gap.

First published in 2006, the IDDRS established the pre-conditions for “traditional” DDR, namely a peace agreement that has the trust of the parties who are willing to engage in a meaningful manner and a secure environment that allows them to disarm without fear of being left vulnerable. I was fortunate to be a part of the development of these standards and to work on their practical application as part of peace mediation processes and peace and security promotion efforts more broadly.

As this important publication notes, these pre-conditions remain relevant, but are increasingly difficult to meet. In many contemporary conflicts, a state-based approach to peacemaking is hard to reconcile with situations where the state is more notable by its absence than its presence and capacity to secure a peace agreement. This has spurred changes in DDR and the way it is applied in peace processes. This evolution is clearly charted out in the first part of the publication, providing a concise yet detailed history of DDR from first, to second, to next generation policy and approach to the subject.

The author draws six insights based on the cases of the Central African Republic and Libya. These reflect realities I have seen in other contexts where DDR has been included in peace processes. Although all are very recognizable, three of them resonate in particular.

First, the need for those managing peace processes to engage with armed groups in discussions that go beyond focusing only on security issues. Armed actors take up weapons for a reason, often political or economic, and no negotiation will succeed if it does not seek to understand what compels these movements to fight and how the peace process responds to these motivations. Yet these demands are rarely given the attention they need.

Second, the requirement to include DDR practitioners in mediation efforts. Mediating a peace agreement is only the first part of a process to exit from a conflict. Implementation of the agreement is often the longest part of a peace process and is never easy. Incorporating DDR practitioners in the

teams supporting mediation processes can ensure that their experience in running DDR processes informs an agreement, making it more likely to succeed.

Third, the sequencing of DDR is key. Although the post-conflict management of fighting forces is often considered purely a security issue, it carries huge political undertones and DDR must also be integrated into and benchmarked with the political negotiations.

Throughout the publication, emphasis is placed on the complex relationship between the actors involved in some of today's violent conflicts. This includes the need to reflect the true role of armed groups in peace talks. The state-based approach to track one mediation can mean that they are often treated as junior partners whereas in reality they may control more territory or, in the eyes of the population, have more legitimacy than the government. In many conflicts, this approach is not just wrong, it is also self-defeating for any attempt to negotiate a sustainable peace. We must overcome this bias if we are to support parties in reaching agreements that respond to all the conflict parties' needs.

These, and many more of the reflections in this publication will enrich the discourse on how to best include DDR in peace processes, and in doing so will help to fill a gap in the thinking on these issues. The lessons in this publication should be read by and should inspire reflections among peace and security practitioners dealing with conflicts where there is a need to manage the fighting forces and implement DDR programs. Their efforts will only be the stronger for it and any agreement reached more likely to succeed.

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# Introduction

There are multiple reasons why peace agreements unravel, including a lack of commitment by the parties, geopolitical dynamics, fragmentation of armed actors, and ineffective third-party responses.<sup>1</sup> Often the reasons lie in the unique combination of conditions found in a given context. When agreements fail to take context-specific conditions sufficiently into account and instead use a set of provisions because they have become standard practice, they are often short lived.

For many conflict parties around the world, the road to peace and security is long. The first step to stop violence is often the adoption of a preliminary ceasefire agreement or similar measures – e.g., security confidence building measures (CBMs). This is followed by negotiations on longer-term approaches to security management that are generally part of a definitive ceasefire agreement, or a comprehensive peace agreement.<sup>2</sup> The result of these negotiations usually takes the shape of security arrangements that include provisions for a DDR program.<sup>3</sup>

DDR is a post-conflict process that specifically targets individual members of armed forces and groups. It is the key standard provision used when the parties aim to regulate the process of disarming combatants and preventing them from returning to armed fighting. However, over the past ten years, its use has been standardized<sup>4</sup> and has become increasingly problematic, as conflict parties and implementing parties have realized that it can

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1 UN, “United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation”, UN, 2012, pp. 4–5, available at [peacemaker.un.org/guidance-effective-mediation](https://www.peacemaker.un.org/guidance-effective-mediation).

2 Other provisions frequently found under security arrangements include Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Security Transition Management. For a comprehensive overview see: Jeremy Brickhill, *Mediating Security Arrangements in Peace Processes: Critical Perspectives from the Field*, (Zurich: CSS Mediation Resources, Center for Security Studies ETH Zurich, 2018).

3 The three phases disarmament, demobilization/reinsertion and reintegration that form a standard DDR program were defined by the UN General Assembly in 2005 in a note by the Secretary-General. Some agreements select two or three of these components to describe a DDR process or use a different sequence, as they mean to adapt it to the conditions found in a specific context. See UN, *Administrative and Budgetary Aspects of the Financing of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, un.org, 2005, available at [digitallibrary.un.org/record/549756](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/549756).

4 The standard practice goes so far that the language used in DDR provisions across different agreements is often the same, no matter the context. Interview with UN senior mediation advisor, Geneva, 7 August 2020. See also: UN, *The Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) Module 2.20, The Politics of DDR*, [unddr.org](https://www.un.org/peacekeeping/standards), 2019.

only be effectively implemented after an end to armed conflict is successfully negotiated.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this realization, DDR provisions continue to be included in agreements, even in contexts where the preconditions for its implementation are not met. This is especially problematic in contexts where non-state armed groups<sup>6</sup> control large territories and resources and the state's institutions are highly ineffective or seen as lacking legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> Examples include the Central African Republic (CAR) and Libya, two extremely fragile contexts that are characterized by an asymmetry of power between the non-state armed groups and the state. Power is a fuzzy concept, but in certain situations, non-state actors are arguably more powerful than the state. They may hold a larger proportion of territory, control more natural resources, or have a greater arsenal of weapons at their disposal. Furthermore, the state's governance capacity may be absent, weak, or seen as illegitimate and thus a threat to large parts of the population. In addition, outside actors often back the armed groups or the state, leading to a situation of rapidly changing power dynamics and proxy war.

When DDR provisions are included in an agreement adopted in an extremely fragile context, this poses a number of challenges for conflict parties and implementing partners. As one of the major implementing partners of national governments in DDR processes, UN peace operations have found themselves confronted with this situation numerous times. The experiences they have had reveal a disconnect between the extent to which third parties engage armed groups in peace negotiations and the power and military balance on the ground. This often leads to situations where the parties attempt to implement DDR, but instead of improving the security situation, violence escalates. To break this cycle of violence, this paper seeks to answer three key questions:

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5 The four preconditions for effective DDR implementation are outlined in section 1 below. See also: UN, *Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations*, (New York: United Nations, 2010), pp. 10–12, available at [peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2gddr\\_eng\\_with\\_cover.pdf](http://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/2gddr_eng_with_cover.pdf).

6 This article will refer to non-state armed groups as “armed groups” and to the state's armed and police forces as “security and defense forces”. The term “members” of armed groups refers to all genders.

7 This paper specifically looks at contexts where peace agreements are concluded and peace operations are deployed in ongoing conflicts. For a complete analysis of and recommendations for DDR and mediation in post-conflict contexts see: Kelvin Ong, *Managing Fighting Forces: DDR in Peace Processes*, (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2012).

- What are the specific challenges of negotiating peace agreements on the track one level in extremely fragile contexts?
- Why is DDR being inserted in peace agreements where only a few or none of the preconditions for its effective implementation are in place, and what can we learn from this?
- What kind of ways forward out of this situation could be considered?

The article is structured as follows:

First, we outline the *problem statement*. We explain the way DDR is inserted into peace agreements first and then Security Council mandates, and the pre-conditions required for their effective implementation. We also explore the potential and limitations of complementary programming developed by the UN in response to traditional DDR, in particular Community Violence Reduction (CVR).

Second, we use the “Actors, Content, Context, Process (ACCP)” *analytical framework* for mediation to structure the questions that we use to analyze our case studies. We argue that this framework is useful for mediators and conflict parties when considering including DDR provisions in an agreement.

Third, we turn to the *cases of the CAR and Libya*, analyzing the role of armed groups in the peace talks and what led to the inclusion of DDR provisions in the agreements adopted. We then share experiences stakeholders have had in trying to implement these agreements.

Fourth, we then present ideas to enrich the discussion on the *way forward*. We explore the possibility of engaging armed groups, communities, and the central state in local governance building initiatives, and we describe how these initiatives could be integrated into different phases of a peace process.

The motivation for writing this article grew out of the author’s experience in negotiating and implementing DDR provisions with conflict parties as a UN official.<sup>8</sup> As such, the insights are mainly based on the experiences of

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<sup>8</sup> The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

UN peace operations<sup>9</sup> in trying to implement DDR in contexts where it was highly challenging or impossible to do so. Over the past few years, these challenges have led to a process of reflection among DDR and mediation professionals from the UN system and beyond on how to effectively address violent armed conflict in extremely fragile states. This publication summarizes some of what has been gained from this ongoing learning process. It includes reflections from thirty-four interviews that were conducted with professionals working in the fields of community violence reduction, DDR, mediation, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and security sector reform in the CAR, Libya, New York and Geneva, as well as with scholars and think tanks in Geneva, London, Paris and Zurich.

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9 UN peace operations are the leading partner of national institutions in the implementation of DDR programs. See: UN Peacekeeping, *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, peacekeeping.un.org, 2020, available at [peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration](https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration).

# 1. Problem Statement

The overall problem we are grappling with is how to stop violent conflicts in contexts where non-state armed groups control large swathes of territory and the central state is weak or absent. Disarming groups responsible for violent fighting is a declared priority of the international community in these contexts. Peace agreements often include DDR provisions in order to achieve this goal. Yet, more often than not, conflict parties and UN peace operations struggle to implement these provisions. Here we explore why DDR implementation faces so many obstacles, how CVR programs emerged, and how far CVR programs can facilitate the implementation of traditional DDR programs.<sup>10</sup>

## Traditional DDR: Pre-conditions Are Often Not Met

To better understand why traditional DDR programs do not seem to be working but are still being attempted in certain contexts, it is helpful to back-track historically and explore how “traditional DDR” was originally designed, and how its use has changed over time. Learning has taken place as to when DDR can be effectively implemented, but dysfunctional practices still continue. Amongst other factors, this seems due to the importance given to DDR in third parties’ state-centric peacebuilding paradigm, and the structural disconnect between the negotiation processes, peace agreement content, UN peace operations’ Security Council mandates, and implementation phases.

*Origins of traditional DDR:* DDR is a traditional post-conflict process. It was originally understood as a technical process of handing over weapons, demobilizing, and providing employment opportunities and psycho-social support to ex-combatants after a conflict had ended. DDR is therefore often perceived as a technical security provision rather than a sensitive political issue.<sup>11</sup> During the Cold War, DDR was used for the rightsiz-

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10 “Traditional DDR programs” are defined as programs that focus mainly on combatants in military structures, involve a range of activities falling under the categories “Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration,” and require four preconditions. Their aim is the completion of DDR for individual members of entire groups that signed an agreement, as opposed to the disengagement of individual members from a group that is still fighting (e.g., Al-Shabaab in Somalia). UN, *Second Generation DDR Practices in Peace Operations*, p.8.

11 Brickhill, *Mediating Security Arrangements in Peace Processes*, pp.16–17.

ing of military forces and for providing alternative employment to former members of military structures<sup>12</sup>. During the 1990s, the concept and practice evolved into a more development-oriented post-conflict program.<sup>13</sup> The reintegration phase became the focus, and thereby the socio-economic situation of entire communities into which combatants would return. With the introduction of multi-dimensional peace operations following the Brahimi Report in 2000,<sup>14</sup> DDR became an integrated program of UN Peacekeeping and development actors, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). As peace operations were increasingly deployed to conflicts involving non-state armed groups, the focus on DDR shifted from its use of right-sizing to civilian reintegration. DDR was now often found to be linked to other post-conflict processes, in particular to recovery and development programs that could contribute to offering socio-economic opportunities for ex-combatants, as well as to Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Transitional Justice.<sup>15</sup> The more these links were promoted, the less attention the disarmament and demobilization phases received.<sup>16</sup> It was taken as a given that armed groups who signed an agreement would complete the first phases of a DDR process. This was often not the case, however, as processes lacked political support, funding, or were not sufficiently inclusive to gain the trust of the groups to be disarmed.<sup>17</sup> This led to well-documented failures of DDR programs, for example, in South Sudan, and to the realization that DDR could be a contested political issue.<sup>18</sup>

Yet learning is happening. Since 2010, there has been a general consensus, officially recognized by the UN, that the problem of DDR is not traditional DDR per se, but rather when the parties try to implement it without the four preconditions for effective DDR implementation in place. As per official UN guidance, DDR requires (1) a *peace agreement* signed by

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12 UN, *Second Generation DDR Practices in Peace Operations*, p.9.

13 *Ibid.*, p.9.

14 UN, *Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations* (New York: UN, 2000), available at [digitallibrary.un.org/record/420963](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/420963).

15 Ong, *Managing Fighting Forces*, p.12; Brickhill, *Mediating Security Arrangements in Peace Processes*, p.59.

16 While the importance of the “reintegration” phase for the success of traditional DDR programs and its links with other post-conflict processes are reflected in the IDDRS, the UN’s key policy document on DDR, donors were often reluctant to fund reintegration programs fully. Interview with UNDP official, Geneva, 18 August 2020.

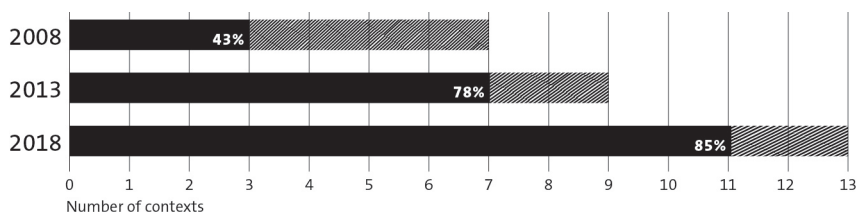
17 *Ibid.*

18 Human Security Baseline Assessment for Sudan and South Sudan, Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration, [smallarmssurveysudan.org](http://smallarmssurveysudan.org), October 2012.



all key parties, (2) *trust* in the peace process, (3) parties' *willingness to engage in DDR*, and (4) a *secure environment*.<sup>19</sup> These conditions reflect the voluntary nature of the program, and thereby the necessity for armed groups to be committed to their disarmament. Nevertheless, the number of contexts where the UN is mandated to support the parties in implementing DDR programs that do not meet these preconditions increased from 43 per cent in 2008 to 85 per cent in 2018, as illustrated in figure 1.

**Figure 1: Percentage of contexts which do not meet the preconditions for DDR<sup>20</sup>**



The UN has reacted and highlighted in a recent revision of its “Integrated DDR Standards”, its key policy document for DDR, the necessity to design politically sensitive DDR processes that are adapted to a specific conflict environment.<sup>21</sup> Yet, despite the learning gained at the policy level, traditional DDR continues to be inserted into UN peace operation mandates, even where it can only be implemented to a limited degree, as illustrated in the case studies below.<sup>22</sup> There are different possible reasons for this, three of which are listed here:

*First, DDR can help establish secure environments for elections:* By engaging ex-combatants in programmatic activities, DDR is considered a way to restore (at least temporarily) safety and security across a country in order to hold elections – the first major milestone in a peace process based on the

19 UN, *Second Generation DDR Practices in Peace Operations*, pp.10–12.

20 In 2018, based on a total of 13 contexts, out of which 11 do not meet the preconditions. World Bank / UN / Social Science Research Council, “The Changing Landscapes of Armed Conflict Groups: Doing DDR in New Contexts,” 2018, p.6, available at [peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the\\_changing\\_landscape\\_of\\_armed\\_groups.pdf](http://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/the_changing_landscape_of_armed_groups.pdf).

21 UN, *IDDRS Module 2.20, The Politics of DDR*, pp.12, 15–16, 18. The IDDRS are developed by the Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR, a UN system-wide coordination mechanism, whose mandate is to ensure that a coherent approach to DDR is applied by all UN actors.

22 Examples include the Central African Republic (see below), Libya (see below), Mali, and South Sudan.

state-centric peacebuilding model. For this reason, political pressure is usually high on a UN mission to launch DDR as early as possible.<sup>23</sup> Bilateral actors expect that with the completion of successful elections and the establishment of a legitimate government, their military engagement can be drawn down, and programs in support of institution building can be launched.<sup>24</sup>

*Second, because DDR is costly, UN peace operations often become the key implementing partner and are expected to deliver quick results:* From the point of view of UN Peacekeeping, DDR is not just any mandated task of a peace operation, but one of the most complex and costly. In many DDR programs that are currently run around the world, UN missions are the main partners of the national authorities in the DDR process, as they usually play a key coordinating role and fund, support, and secure the implementation of the disarmament and demobilization phases.<sup>25</sup> In fact, when looking at the logistical, security, and coordination efforts required to launch and implement DDR in countries with a peacekeeping operation and a DDR mandate, the launch of the program hinges on the support provided by the UN mission.<sup>26</sup> This dependency on UN support can be problematic, such as when armed groups are neither ready nor committed to disarm, yet UN missions are requested to support the implementation of DDR, and are under pressure to produce results.

*Third, DDR is inserted into UN Security Council mandates due to the structural disconnect between the mediation process, content of a peace agreement, and the implementation phase:* DDR provisions are inserted into negotiated agreements as standard “good practice”, often without sufficient analysis of whether or not DDR can be realistically implemented – e.g., without taking the four pre-conditions into account. Partially, this is because of the way peace negotiations are designed and run under time pressure, sometimes facing extremely challenging circumstances. Peace agreements may also be signed for political or symbolic reasons – e.g., to get donor money, to show

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23 Phone interview with UN official, 16 October 2018.

24 “Support to creating a conducive environment” is one of the key types of electoral assistance provided by the UN, in particular in a peace operation context. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), *Elections*, [dppa.un.org](http://dppa.un.org), 2021, available at [dppa.un.org/en/elections](http://dppa.un.org/en/elections).

25 The main partner of national governments for civilian reintegration in countries with a peacekeeping operation is currently the World Bank. Other key partners are the UNDP, which has played a lead role in the past, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

26 The three largest ongoing DDR programs in Africa are supported by a UN peace operation. UN Peacekeeping, *DDR*.

something is being done – with insufficient consideration of what can actually be implemented. Furthermore, mediation teams and conflict parties may not have direct access to DDR practitioners when drafting the provisions of an agreement. When they do, they may not necessarily follow their recommendations.<sup>27</sup> In some peace processes (e.g., in Darfur and Colombia) this has been corrected by bringing in implementers before the signing of the peace agreement to work with the parties and to check the feasibility of the peace agreement. To explain and promote this practice, the UN has issued advice on how mediation teams can request DDR expertise.<sup>28</sup> But as the case studies below show, this good practice is rarely adequately implemented. Once an agreement is signed and the UN Security Council mandates a field mission to support the implementation of the DDR program, this decision is essentially taken based on the content of the negotiated agreement and generally without further analysis of the conditions on the ground. The Security Council assumes that the DDR provisions that are included in an agreement can be implemented and does not want to be seen questioning the will of the parties. This largely explains the high number of UN missions with a DDR mandate in contexts where the preconditions are not met.

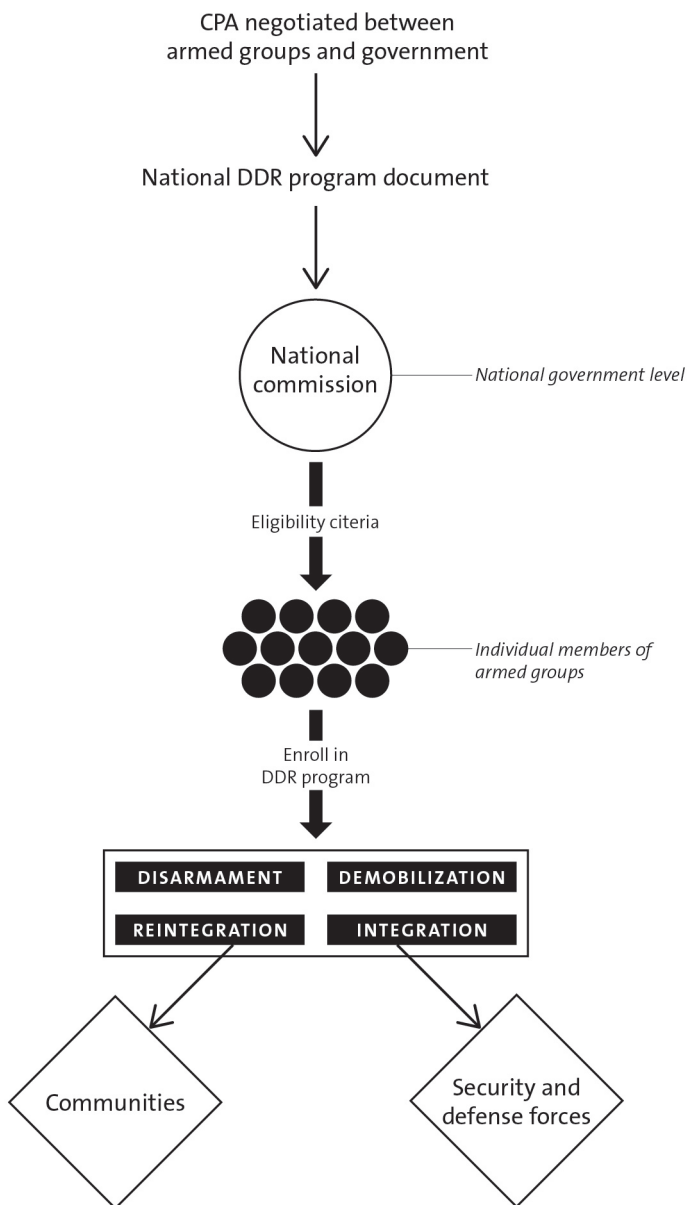
Figure 2 shows that a traditional DDR program is based on DDR provisions of a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA), brokered by an international third party. The program is overseen by a national governmental body and targets individual members of armed groups.

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27 Interview with UN senior mediation advisor, Geneva, 13 September 2018.

28 UN, “DDR Support to Mediation Processes,” UN, 2018, available at [peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dds\\_support\\_to\\_mediation\\_process\\_2018.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dds_support_to_mediation_process_2018.pdf). See also: Ong, *Managing Fighting Forces*, p. 60; UN, IDDRS Module 2.20, *The Politics of DDR*, pp. 15–16.

Figure 2: The Traditional Approach to DDR



## The Emergence of Community Violence Reduction in UN Peace Operations

As a result of the challenges identified above, where national DDR commissions and DDR practitioners in UN peace operations were confronted with obstacles to DDR program implementation, they created new approaches, more adapted to the conditions found in the specific context they were dealing with.

In contexts where disarmament was not a realistic option in the short or medium term, sequencing flexibility (Afghanistan) and weapons management programs (Afghanistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, West Africa) were designed.<sup>29</sup> Where armed elements outside the peace process constituted a considerable threat, practices targeting specific groups emerged, such as commander incentive programs (Afghanistan, Liberia), at-risk youth / gang programs (Haiti, Sierra Leone) and pension schemes (Liberia).<sup>30</sup>

The more often DDR was mandated to be implemented in conflict environments where the preconditions were not met, the more comprehensive the new approaches became. When a new peace operation was deployed to the Central African Republic in 2014 – a context with active armed group fighting – the UN Mission designed a “pre-DDR” program, which focused on reducing violence at the community-level.<sup>31</sup>

For a long time, none of these locally programed practices emerged as a more widely accepted alternative to traditional DDR. They rather appeared as a landscape of diverse initiatives, whose success or failure was hard to measure and which often only complemented one of the three phases of DDR.<sup>32</sup> Their underlying logic remained difficult to understand for the wider peacebuilding community, making a shift in how DDR provisions in negotiated agreements were drafted less likely.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, the emergence of continuously evolving practices led to discussions among scholars and practitioners on how to classify them. In 2010, the UN, cooperating with scholars and think tanks, subsumed the pol-

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29 Robert Muggah / Chris O'Donnell, “Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration”, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4:1 (2015), p.7, available at [doi.org/10.5334/sta.fs](https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.fs).

30 UN, IDDRS Module 2.20, The Politics of DDR, pp. 41–57.

31 See chapter three below.

32 Muggah/O'Donnell, *Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, p. 3.

33 Online interview with UN official, 16 August 2018.

icy options developed in its field operations under the term “Second Generation DDR.”<sup>34</sup> More recently, scholars have attempted to draw a distinction between “first wave” and “second generation” DDR programs, adding a “next generation” of DDR, which describes the practice of disengaging single combatants from violent extremist groups.<sup>35</sup>

### **Community Violence Reduction (CVR)**

Since 2015, this discussion has been transformed, as Community Violence Reduction (CVR) has become a widely rolled out practice for contexts where traditional DDR could not be launched or fully implemented. It has asserted itself as the most impactful and easy-to-operationalize practice, becoming a key mandated task in UN peace operations in the CAR, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and South Sudan, which were running into obstacles in implementing DDR.<sup>36</sup>

CVR was originally created when the Security Council extended the UN Mission in Haiti’s (MINUSTAH) mandate in 2006 to respond to gang violence in the country. From the beginning, one of CVR’s key characteristics was that it did not require a national political agreement or institution, making it independent from national-level political processes.<sup>37</sup> This brings advantages and disadvantages. What enabled CVR to gain popularity was its flexible programming approach, which prompted the UN in 2015 to use the concept to design a CVR program for the Central African Republic. The early gains achieved in the CAR program subsequently led the Security Council to request all peacekeeping operations with a DDR mandate to implement CVR.

Contrary to traditional DDR programs – where a national commission is the key actor (see figure 2) – external partners and local communities are the main actors in CVR (see figure 3). CVR programs that are funded by UN peace operations and implemented with partner agencies – such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Office for Project

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34 UN, *Second Generation DDR Practices in Peace Operations*, pp. 21–29, 37–40.

35 Muggah/O’Donnell, *Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration*, pp. 4–8; Stuart Casey-Maslen / Oluwaseyitan Ayotunde Solademi / Josephat Muuo Kilonzo, “Disarmament, Demobilisation & Reintegration and the Disarming of Armed Groups During Armed Conflict,” Pretoria University Law Press, 2019, p. 2, available at [chr.up.ac.za/images/publications/ahrpp/ahrpp1/AHRPP1.pdf](http://chr.up.ac.za/images/publications/ahrpp/ahrpp1/AHRPP1.pdf).

36 Over the past 5 budgetary years, the UN Missions in the CAR, Darfur, the DRC and Mali have counted over 316,000 CVR beneficiaries. United Nations Department of Peace Operations, DDR Section, (internal document), 2021.

37 Like a national DDR commission.

Services (UNOPS), and local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – are selected, vetted, and monitored by a local committee.<sup>38</sup> The composition of these local committees – sometimes called “local peace committees” or “local security committees” – is meant to mirror the composition of the community. The identified needs for projects can range from the rehabilitation of basic infrastructure and public goods to the creation of small businesses. A typical CVR project starts with the local community identifying a security threat or conflict driver. For example, this could involve a scarcity of water that causes conflict. The community could then decide to build a well to fight this problem by employing members of armed groups and at-risk youth with funding from the international community.<sup>39</sup>

An important dimension of CVR is dialogue. The local committees mediate conflict and initiate local dialogue initiatives. Members of opposing armed groups are encouraged to work together. This increases social cohesion and has the potential to prevent further conflict, even at times leading to the negotiation of local ceasefires. Participants who possess weapons have the opportunity to put these aside in a storage facility, at least temporarily. This reduces the number of weapons in circulation, where weapons collection or safe weapon storage are an inherent part of the projects. Figure 3 illustrates the important role of the community in the different stages of the CVR project cycle. Contrary to traditional DDR, CVR is created by and for communities.<sup>40</sup> Beneficiaries are not limited to members of armed groups, but also include other community members. The only external actor involved is the third party that provides direct support to the local committee.

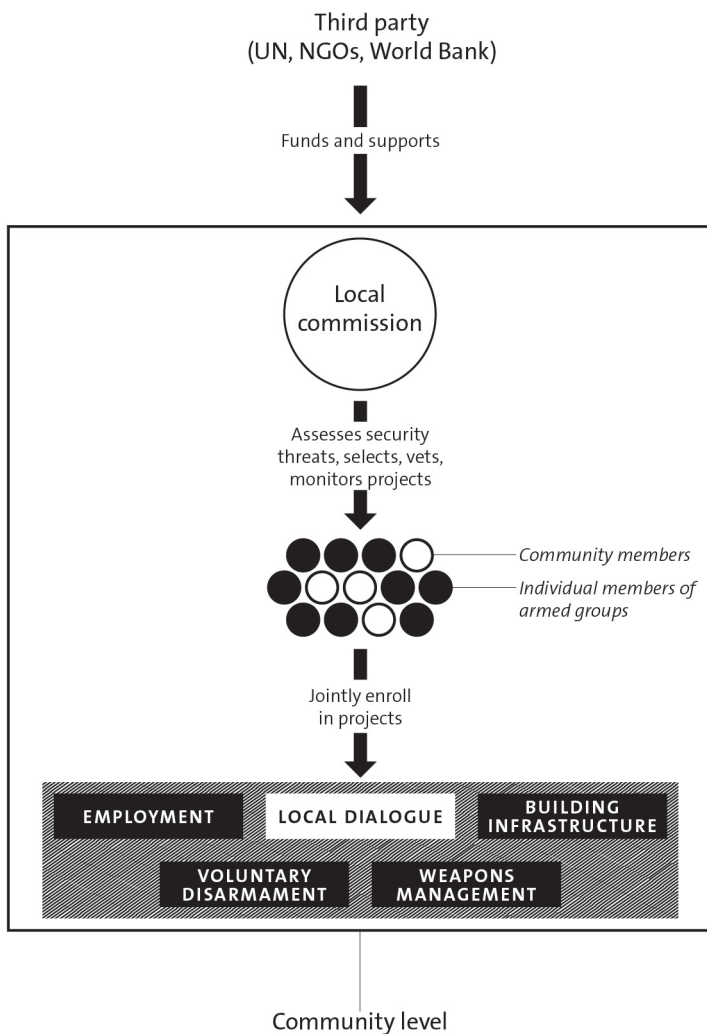
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38 Robert Muggah / Jean de Dieu Ntanga Ntita, “Reducing Community Violence in the Central African Republic – The Case of Bria,” *Small Wars Journal*, 16.08.2018, available at [smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/reducing-community-violence-central-african-republic-case-bria](http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/reducing-community-violence-central-african-republic-case-bria).

39 In Haiti, the first step to a CVR project was the identification of a priority area, e.g., areas with security risks and the presence of violent gangs. This was followed by the establishment of community forums of about 100 members, led by the mayor’s office, which each received a 100,000 USD grant and were responsible to approve projects to be implemented, targeting specifically at-risk youth. UN, *Second Generation DDR Practices in Peace Operations*, p. 45.

40 This does not mean that CVR is taking place without national authorities being aware of it. As it is mandated as part of peace operations, the host government needs to agree to it. Interview with UN DDR official, New York, 17 December 2018.

Figure 3: Community Violence Reduction





## Successes of CVR

CVR programs have achieved positive results to stabilize the security situation at the local level in the short term. They have been able to foster local dialogue and improve social cohesion.<sup>41</sup> External evaluations conducted for the CVR program in the CAR indicated a significant change in the infrastructure, economic situation, and reduction of violence in the community, which encouraged local populations to return and invest.<sup>42</sup>

As a consequence, they have been able to attract significant international funding, i.e., 25 million USD for CVR in the CAR between 2015 and 2019.<sup>43</sup> The advantage of CVR is the flexibility of the concept, which can be adapted to local needs and may differ from one community to the next.<sup>44</sup> CVR projects can thus respond to threats and tensions in specific local areas and empower the community. As they are delinked from national-level processes, they are far less exposed to political influence. This can help to pacify a situation without fueling an armed group's fears that it is giving in to the national government on the political level. As armed groups do not need to disarm for CVR, they do not have to give up their leverage to the central state or their bargaining position in a negotiation. The local dialogue dimension of CVR also opens up space to address grievances that are shared by members of armed groups, women, youth, and other community members, and it can lead to the conclusion of local ceasefires. This means it can help prevent, address, and end locally-driven conflict.

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41 One practitioner responsible for CVR in the CAR described its positive impact on social cohesion as the formation of a "new social contract within a community". Phone interview with former UN official, 7 April 2020.

42 Transition International, (2017), Final Evaluation CVR Project Paoua (internal document), p. 28; Transition International, (2016), Mid-term review, CAR pre-DDR program (internal document), p. 2.

43 As of 1 December 2019, 22,100 direct beneficiaries were enrolled in the CVR program in the CAR. Between 2015 and 2019, the CVR efforts led by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) alone managed to mobilize 25 million USD, including 10.5 million USD from external donors, such as the UN Peacebuilding Fund, the US, and Canada. As of 1 May 2020, 77 per cent of MINUSCA's yearly 6.258 million USD budget was earmarked for CVR activities. The World Bank – after making the disbursement of its 22 million USD funds for DDR in the CAR dependent on a political agreement that has the buy-in of armed groups – decided in 2018 to reallocate 9 million USD of these funds to CVR. Also in 2018, the EU pledged 17 million USD for a three-year community stabilization program with the IOM, the main partner of CVR in the CAR, as the implementing partner. MINUSCA has developed a national CVR strategy to ensure coordination of the increasing number of partners, while keeping the strategic lead of the program. UN, MINUSCA DDR Factsheet (internal document), 2020.

44 For the case of CVR in Bria, see: Muggah / de Dieu Ntanga Ntita, *Reducing Community Violence in the Central African Republic*.

## Limitations and Risks of CVR

The role of the community is a key factor in the success of CVR. The composition of the local committees, therefore, needs to represent all parts of society across conflict lines and include religious actors, elders, women, business associations, and others. This helps avoid bias in project allocations that could trigger tensions within a community and ensures local ownership. At the same time, community empowerment only works in places where local authorities and customary practices are effective and seen as legitimate. Local structures are often destroyed or polarized by violent conflict, and, thus, these committees crossing conflict lines can at times be challenging to form.

Furthermore, the launch of the projects needs to be agreed with the leadership of the armed groups in control of the area they are being implemented in. The leadership of an armed group is unlikely to allow them to take place if they have the potential to weaken their bargaining position in the peace talks. This may be the case when an armed group leader perceives the projects as individual combatant “buy-off” programs that could undermine their legitimacy and fighting capacity, while offering less attractive benefits than a DDR program.<sup>45</sup>

Even when armed groups agree to CVR, their members can keep their weapons of war and return to active combat if the wider conflict re-escalates.<sup>46</sup> This has the potential to draw communities into the conflict and destroy all the gains achieved by the projects.

This risk illustrates that one of the biggest assets of CVR programs is also their biggest weakness: they are conceived as a stop-gap measure, designed to bridge the time until an end to the conflict is negotiated and armed groups are ready to disarm and reintegrate. The reduction of violence and building of infrastructure is the result of a temporary local consensus on the need to improve security and the economy in a situation of distress, rather than being the result of political negotiations at the national level. As a mechanism to report the results of local dialogue fostered by these programs is usually missing, CVR programs do not effectively contribute to substantial negotiations at the national level. In some cases, the fact that they are supported by the same third party that is supporting national mediation efforts, i.e., the UN, may raise wrong expectations among the local population as to

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45 Phone interview with former UN official, 7 April 2020.

46 Disarmament as part of CVR is voluntary. Usually, a weapons storage facility is put in place. Some participants may surrender artisanal weapons but keep their weapons of war.

how their local conflict resolution efforts are valued and linked to high-level peace talks. This may contribute to undermining their trust in the peace process.

As important and constructive as CVR programs are, they can only contribute to bringing about an end of the conflict if the grievances that are raised in the local dialogues, and the progress that is made by communities, can find a way into national-level peace talks.

## **Conclusion**

The challenges that traditional DDR faces start when DDR provisions are included in a peace agreement even when the necessary preconditions for its effective implementation are not in place, or the steps to reach an environment conducive for disarmament are not specified in the agreement's implementation modalities. This happens because DDR is widely considered as the standard approach to establish the state's monopoly of force or return it, and as its limitations and risks are insufficiently known or considered. As the UN Security Council mandates UN peace operations to support DDR, when agreements negotiated in host countries include DDR provisions, DDR programs are attempted in various contexts even though the chances for their effective implementation are limited at best. To mitigate the security threats resulting from delays in DDR implementation, different approaches have been developed by the UN, with CVR emerging as the key approach.

While CVR has been shown to reduce armed group violence and to contribute to social cohesion, it is neither a replacement for traditional DDR, nor does it sufficiently create the pre-conditions for it.<sup>47</sup> Due to their bottom-up nature, CVR programs' impact on the extension of state authority is limited and their improvement of the security situation fragile. As they are generally disconnected from national-level mediation processes, the result of the local dialogues they foster are only rarely reflected in national-level peace agreements. This means that these national-level peace agreements are unlikely to be owned by armed groups – leaving one of the key preconditions for effective DDR unfulfilled.

As commendable as the Security Council's adoption of CVR as a key task in peace operations is, it is not the solution to the problem that these contexts face. Finding a way forward requires rethinking the way armed

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47 Online interview with UNOPS official, 18 June 2019.

groups are engaged in peace processes. In the following section, we seek to contribute to this process. We develop an analytical tool for mediators and conflict parties to help clarify the benefits and risks of including DDR provisions in a given peace agreement.

## 2. Actors, Content, Context, Process (ACCP) Analytical Framework

Analysis is key to identifying context-specific responses to complex conflict situations. Two questions are important to consider before starting a mediation process: First, can negotiations be used in the specific situation and for what purpose, or are there sometimes contexts where other approaches may be needed? Second, if negotiations are deemed the best way forward, how can security provisions be negotiated with conflict parties so as to lead to balanced and implementable agreements?

With our specific focus on armed groups in peace talks, our analytical focus is on when and how questions around DDR appear in the preparation of a mediation process and throughout the different stages of the negotiation of a settlement. We argue that better systematic analysis will lead to more context-specific approaches in the mediation process as regards DDR-related questions.

One of the analysis frameworks commonly used to this end is the “Actor-Content-Context-Process” (ACCP) model.<sup>48</sup> The ACCP framework allows the mediator and mediation team to keep an overview of all key areas that require their attention. The ACCP model distinguishes four areas of attention – or four “baskets”: Actor, content, context, process and corresponding guiding questions that can be used to reflect on initiating and facilitating a mediation process. The work on these four areas starts with a clear definition of the “objective” of the analysis or process.

For the purpose of this paper, we will use the ACCP model as an analytical tool to better understand how questions around DDR were tackled in the case studies in the following section. While many other key questions are usually contained in the four baskets, we focus here solely on questions related to DDR. The list of questions, while non-exhaustive, presents some of the key questions that mediation teams, advisors, and conflict parties may want to reflect on and discuss before including DDR provisions in a peace or ceasefire agreement.

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48 “Designing Processes: The ACCP Model,” in: Owen Frazer / Lakhdar Ghettas (eds.), *Conflict Transformation in Practice: Approaches to Conflict Transformation*, (Geneva: The Cordoba Now Forum, 2013), pp. 8–10. This section on the ACCP model is based on a presentation by Julian Hottinger. See also: ETH Zurich ACCP *Conflict Analysis Framework – A Video Illustration*, ethz.ch, 2020, available at [mas-mediation.ethz.ch/tools/accp-conflict-analysis-framework.html](https://mas-mediation.ethz.ch/tools/accp-conflict-analysis-framework.html).

## Objective

Agreements that contain DDR provisions are usually built around a state-centric approach to peacebuilding that focuses on the elections of a democratic government, institution building, transitional justice, and reconciliation. In this approach, DDR is meant to help establish the monopoly of the use of force in the hands of the state. This is a highly sensitive process, and armed actors who are to give up their weapons will only do so if their key grievances are addressed and their security needs met.

To assess whether DDR will be the right tool to contribute to establishing the monopoly of force of the state in a given situation, three key questions could be considered:

- a *Common and feasible objective?* Is the objective set for the peace process a common objective of the parties to the conflict, including the armed groups and influential regional or international actors backing the parties? How feasible is the objective, given knowledge of context and past efforts?
- b *Are key concerns satisfied?* What will motivate the armed groups expected to participate in DDR to give up their control over territory to the state, and is this something that can realistically be negotiated between the parties during a mediation process?
- c *Context favorable?* How ready is the context for peacebuilding and – in a state-centric approach – state building? What will it take for the state to take over the control of territory from armed groups, i.e., how do the security and defense forces, as well as civilian administration bodies, need to be trained, equipped, and accepted by the population to fulfil their mandate?

The first question is important to ensure that all the parties identify with the goal of the negotiations and any ensuing peace agreement. The second question will help to assess what will realistically be needed at a political level for armed groups to give up their military power. Third, armed groups can only transfer their control to the state if the state is ready to receive it. A realistic assessment is needed here on how long this may take and what steps are needed to get there.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Experience shows that in countries with weak state institutions, this will take many years rather than a few months.

## Actors

The question of “who needs to be part of the mediation process?” requires clarification on power, willingness and the commitment of all those concerned by the implementation of the agreement. DDR is a voluntary exercise. One of the preconditions for a successful DDR process is that armed groups are committed to the terms of the peace agreement. This commitment needs to encompass the peace agreement as a whole, not only the DDR provisions. This has direct implications as to who is in the negotiations. If the representative of an armed group that is one of the main conflict parties does not have the authority to negotiate on behalf of the group, the latter’s commitment is likely to be low. The following questions may help to assess who is relevant:

- a *Relations*: Who are the military, political, economic, traditional, and religious actors in a given context, and what are the relations between them?
- b *Motivation*: What could motivate armed groups in control of vast parts of the territory to commit to a negotiated settlement that aims at their disarmament and demobilization, thereby ending their fight?
- c *Representation*: How can all key armed groups be adequately represented in the peace process? Do the delegates have the authority to negotiate on behalf of the groups?<sup>50</sup> Where armed groups are closely linked with communities, how can leaders of the communities, including women representatives, be included, directly or indirectly?
- d *Governance capacity*: What will it take for the government and international actors to create the governance conditions for DDR, i.e., building their capacity to fill the governance vacuum that will be created during the implementation process once the armed groups sign the agreement and disengage?

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50 Brickhill, *Mediating Security Arrangements in Peace Processes*, p. 18. Often the distinction is made between “minimum,” “good to have,” and “maximum” relevance. A humanitarian ceasefire may require the participation of different actors than those in a political agreement. When negotiating a ceasefire or security aspects of a peace agreement, Brickhill stipulates that “every armed actor” should be part of the negotiations. See p. 36.

- e *Security capacity*: How competent are the security and defense forces and who are they composed of? Can they guarantee the security conditions for DDR? How far can the integration of armed groups be negotiated and implemented as part of the overall agreement? What will it take to make them effectively function and present throughout the country –in addition to training and equipment?

The complexity of different actors and their relations and motivations needs to be understood in order to design a negotiation process.<sup>51</sup> In cases where an armed group is not ready or committed to disarm or demobilize, they cannot be forced to do so through a peace agreement, especially if this is a group that holds control over important parts of the territory or presents a military threat to other groups. Armed groups often use the fact that their leader or other high-ranking representative was not welcome at the negotiations as an excuse to refuse to disarm. When they feel left out of the negotiations, they are likely to become a spoiler to the peace process.

## Content

Power- and wealth sharing provisions, especially in contexts with strong armed groups and weak state institutions, are intrinsically linked to DDR provisions. Armed groups that are in control of important parts of the territory where they cannot be defeated are unlikely to give up their control, guaranteed by their weapons, if they do not receive something in return. Thus, DDR can only be launched if an agreement is reached on power- and wealth-sharing provisions that is negotiated by the state and the groups to be disarmed. The state and the armed groups also need to negotiate the specific form of DDR and the timelines and plan of when and how it will happen.

To ensure that the conditionality between power- and wealth-sharing provisions and DDR is clear to the parties, the following questions are useful:

- a *Topics and their links*: What security, political, economic, etc. topics are at the heart of the conflict and how are they interlinked?

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51 For complementary guiding questions, see the “Peacemaker’s Toolkit,” in: Ong, *Managing Fighting Forces*, p.15.



- b *Grievances*: How can grievances that are of particular importance to a group and that are indicative of the root causes of conflict be addressed and solutions found?
- c *Incentives*: What incentives can be provided to the armed groups as part of power- and wealth-sharing provisions to create credible incentives for them to disarm?
- d *Security guarantees*: What other provisions need to be negotiated to lead to processes and mechanisms to foster the security situation of armed groups? Can a preliminary ceasefire be negotiated and implemented to foster parties' trust?
- e *Alternatives to traditional DDR*: Is DDR really the right tool to get the groups to disengage? What alternative approaches could apply?
- f *Governance*: Where and how is governance provided to citizens? What governance role have armed groups taken over in areas under their control? Since when has this been the case? What experience do local populations have with the state, armed groups and other actors exercising governance functions?

## Context

DDR programs were conceived to take place in a post-conflict state, and not in one characterized by ongoing armed conflict. The negotiation and implementation of a peace agreement should lead to this post-conflict situation for a full DDR program to occur. However, different context factors outside the direct influence of conflict parties and mediators need to be reflected on, as they may affect the conflict and change one's approach to negotiations:

- a *Historical context*: What past events and narratives are shaping the current conflict and processes to address it?
- b *Present context*: What context factors which are currently occurring may shape the conflict and process (e.g., the regional or global economic situation, the pandemic)?

- c *Future, potential context*: What future context factors may play a role in the conflict or process (e.g., those related to regional dynamics, climate change, geo-political changes, or technological developments)?

## Process

DDR can only be launched once the members of armed groups feel safe to hand over their weapons and are confident to put their security and those of communities in areas under their control in the hands of national or international forces<sup>52</sup>. In light of this, mediators and conflict parties may consider discussing the following questions:

- a *Preparatory steps*: What needs to happen before a DDR process can be launched (e.g., informal contacts, a cessation of hostilities, a preliminary ceasefire, etc.)?
- b *Negotiation objective and process*: Are the relevant groups in agreement with the overall objective of the political negotiations?
- c *Participation*: Have all key actors been included in the process?
- d *Agenda and format*: Will all groups expected to participate in DDR be involved in the process of setting the agenda of the talks, and could they shape the negotiations of the final peace agreement? Will sufficient time be allocated to address their key grievances? What concerns have major groups expressed regarding past, present, and future processes? Do they agree on the who, what, when, where, and how of the process design?
- e *Implementation sequence*: Before signing, but after having negotiated the substantive content of the agreement, have the mediators and parties determined in what sequence the different parts of the agreement need to be implemented? How DDR may condition political power-sharing and other topics? How these and other topics may condition DDR implementation?
- f *DDR implementation*: How is DDR linked to other parts of the peace process? What has to occur before a DDR process can be launched (e.g., the building of governance capacity)? How long will it take for the

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52 UN, *Second Generation DDR Practices in Peace Operations*, p.12.

security and defense forces to create a safe and secure environment for DDR to happen?

- g *Subsequent steps*: What efforts are needed following a DDR process, including those related to security sector reform and transitional justice, and how can these be anchored and negotiated?

### **Do No Harm**

In some cases, a mediation process may end with the signing of an agreement with DDR provisions, but without some of the parties who are expected to disarm taking on ownership of the agreement. This is often the case when armed groups are not satisfied with the outcome of the power- and wealth-sharing provisions. Armed group leaders will not participate in DDR, even if they signed the agreement, if they feel left out or unsatisfied with the process or outcome. This in turn may create a sensitive political and security climate that can lead to an escalation or re-escalation of the conflict. A group that is not (sufficiently) included in the negotiations may feel provoked and resort to massive violence against other conflict parties, including civilians.<sup>53</sup> In order to avoid this scenario, the following reflections on the “do no harm” principle may be useful:

- a *Nature of violence*: How has the violence between the parties been affected by the political negotiations? Have negotiations on DDR or past DDR programs led to increased violence or massively changed the nature of violence?
- b *Third party pressure*: Has third party pressure been used so that the conflict parties sign an agreement they feel they do not own?
- c *Balance and clarity of agreement*: Are the power- and wealth-sharing provisions, as well as the DDR provisions, sufficiently clear and satisfying to the key players to ensure that they will abide by them?
- d *Implementation plan*: Is the implementation plan feasible and clear, including regarding “what if” clauses?

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53 As Ong points out: “During negotiations, unrealistic promises and expectations may distract from the real issues of negotiating DDR, while sowing seeds for future conflict.” *Managing Fighting Forces*, p.13.

The “do no harm” principle is particularly relevant in contexts where the state has not been functioning for years or has never existed at all. As the two case studies below show, relying on DDR as the go-to approach for a state to gain the legitimate monopoly of force in the short or medium term is a highly risky and often unrealistic approach. It is therefore necessary to continuously question the relevance of traditional DDR if the pre-conditions are not in place.

The analytical tool formed by this list of questions can help guide conflict parties and mediators in negotiating agreements that match the reality of the conflict they are seeking to resolve. It is also useful to review past experiences, as this can help illustrate the impact of the way peace negotiations are designed on the sustainability of peace agreements.

### 3. Case Studies

In the following, we present the cases of two extremely fragile states where track one mediation efforts led to the adoption of agreements that included DDR provisions. The conflict parties struggled to implement these agreements, with significant consequences for the peace processes. We will use the ACCP analytical framework presented above to analyze how armed groups were involved in the peace negotiations, why DDR was included in the negotiated agreements, and what happened when the parties attempted to implement these agreements.

#### Central African Republic

The Central African Republic (CAR) has experienced long-running and cyclical waves of violence and conflict, driven by the absence of the state and the extreme structural marginalization of certain regions by successive governments.<sup>54</sup> Described by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's fragility index as a "chronically fragile" state, and coming second to last on the Human Development Index, the CAR is one of the least developed countries in the world, and also one with the weakest state institutions.<sup>55</sup> The absence of the central state administration and state security forces from areas in the northeast, northwest and the southeast for decades led to the emergence of local self-defense groups and armed non-state groups across the country.<sup>56</sup> Experts estimate that since 2003, successive governments in Bangui have only controlled about 30 per cent of the territory, creating a "grey zone" of armed group dominance in the rest of the country.<sup>57</sup> State institutions headquartered in Bangui have failed to deliver even the

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54 Michael J. Brown / Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic and Beyond," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* (2015), p. 14; UN, Department of Peace Operations, DDR Section, Factsheet MINUSCA (April 2017).

55 UN Development Programme, (2020), Latest Human Development Index, available at: [hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking](https://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking).

56 These groups attract large numbers of "angry and alienated youth" who feel politically and economically marginalized. Brown/Zahar, *Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic*, p. 17.

57 International Crisis Group (ICG), "Avoiding the Worst in the Central African Republic," ICG, 2017 p.7, available at [crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/253-avoiding-worst-central-african-republic](https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/central-african-republic/253-avoiding-worst-central-african-republic).

most basic services to the population, the majority of whom live from subsistence farming.<sup>58</sup>

In the absence of the state, armed groups in the periphery regions, particularly in the northeast, established their own security governance systems and sometimes acted as providers of other services without any system of accountability.<sup>59</sup> They also engaged in violent conflict with each other over control of territory and resources, including gold and diamond mines and pastoralist migration routes. Thus, the marginalization of the northern regions and longstanding intercommunal competition developed hand in hand, at times growing into hostility. This hostility has been one of the root causes of low-intensity conflicts between groups in the north and the northern border regions that have been going on in the country for years.

### From State Weakness to Civil War

These low-intensity conflicts escalated in December 2012 when the groups from the northeast – Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace (CPJP), the Union for Democratic Forces for Unity (UFDR), the Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (MLCJ), and the Patriotic Convention for the Country’s Salvation (CPSK) – decided to form a coalition (“*Séléka*” in Sango)<sup>60</sup> and started an insurgency, which transformed into a civil war and led to the country’s worst crisis since independence.

The civil war can be partly considered a result of the failed Libreville peace process (2008–2012), which was supposed to lead to a disarmament of all groups in the north. A peace agreement signed in 2008 between the government and the armed groups had aimed to put an end to armed group fighting by requesting all signatory groups to complete a DDR program (Art. 4). The agreement declared that the state’s security and defense forces would be in charge of security in the country.<sup>61</sup> The armed groups had re-

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58 Brown/Zahar, *Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic*, p. 13; Muggah/de Dieu Ntanga Ntita, *Reducing Community Violence in the Central African Republic*.

59 Only one of the armed groups, *Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique* (FPRC), is said to have been able to act as administrative authority in the territory under their control. The others mostly focus on the provision of often “double-edged security services.” Phone interview with MINUSCA official, 12 May 2020.

60 Once the fighting between *Séléka* and anti-*Balaka* was stopped and a transitional government was in place, the coalition – more a “coalition of convenience” than a unified front – started to call itself “ex-*Séléka*”.

61 Not only were the FACA in no position to effectively deploy to the north, but disarming the armed groups would have left entire populations exposed and vulnerable to attacks from groups in the northern border region, according to one senior humanitarian official who advised against it. Interview with former BINUCA Official, New York, 17 December 2018.

quested the discussion of power- and wealth-sharing arrangements, but no such provisions were negotiated. Instead, the government of then-president François Bozizé had promised that this would happen at a later stage. When a meeting was finally convened three years later, it did not lead to any concrete outcome.<sup>62</sup> As the armed groups in the northeast were in control of infrastructure and territory, and as they were militarily better equipped than groups in the northwest, they refused to disarm when the DDR program was launched. Growing frustrated about the lack of progress in negotiations, they decided to form the *Séléka*.<sup>63</sup>

After the *Séléka* succeeded in ousting then-president Bozizé from power in a coup in March 2013, some of his supporters and their communities in and around Bangui and the northwest of the country formed self-defense groups (“Anti-Balaka”),<sup>64</sup> who fought back against the *Séléka* and the communities they perceived to be supporting the coalition.<sup>65</sup> A brutal and violent conflict broke out that only came to an end when the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of the French military operation *Sangaris* in December 2013.<sup>66</sup> While the poorly trained and equipped CAR military – the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) – was not able to provide much resistance to the *Séléka*, considerable numbers of its members joined the Anti-Balaka, often switching between FACA uniform during the day and militia outfits at night, and engaged in brutal attacks against civilians they believed to be Muslims.<sup>67</sup>

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62 Interview with UN official, New York, 17 December 2018.

63 Ibid.

64 The term “anti-*Balaka*” is derived from Sango street language and can be loosely translated to “anti-bullets.” It is meant to suggest that the fighters are spiritually protected against bullets fired by their opponents.

65 The anti-*Balaka*’s revenge attacks were targeting the Muslim population. Although the conflict is not a religious one, it “ultimately resulted in ethnoreligious cleansing”. Brown/Zahar, *Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic*, p. 11.

66 The *Séléka* was unofficially backed by countries in the region, which were interested in politically supporting the Muslim population in the northeast. However, the African Union, faced with the brutality of the conflict, decided to deploy a peacekeeping force, the International Support Mission for Central Africa (MISCA), which together with *Opération Sangaris*, managed to stabilize the security situation in the country.

67 Interview with MINUSCA official, New York, 19 December 2018.

### Timeline: Central African Republic<sup>68</sup>



**2003–2005** Rebel leader Bozizé takes power and is elected president

**2005–2008** Armed group violence in the north of the country

**June 2008** Libreville Peace Agreement signed, requesting the DDR of armed groups

**November 2012 – June 2014** Civil war: Séléka, a coalition of armed groups from the northeast take Bangui, remove Bozizé from power, and are later ousted by the Anti-Balaka

**July 2014** Cessation of hostilities agreement signed (Brazzaville)

**May 2015** DDR Agreement and Pacte Républicain signed (Bangui)

**November 2015** Pre-DDR program launched

**December 2015** Angola-sponsored peace agreement signed (Nairobi)

**June 2017** Sant’Egidio Agreement signed (Rome), followed by EU roundtable of mediators

**July 2017** Upsurge in violence leads to evacuation of humanitarian personnel

**July 2017** Adoption of African Union Roadmap (Libreville)

**February 2019** African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation leads to signing of African Union-sponsored peace agreement (Khartoum)

**March 2019** Inclusive government appointed

**December 2020 / January 2021** Presidential elections. A new armed group coalition attacks several cities across the country

## Peace Mediation Initiatives led by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), 2014–2017

After the deployment of France’s *Opération Sangaris* put a halt to major armed group fighting, the international community appointed an “international mediation” led by ECCAS, which also comprised the African Union (AU) and the UN.

68 ICG, *Avoiding the Worst in the Central African Republic*; ICG, “Making the Central African Republic’s Latest Peace Agreement Stick,” ICG, 18.06.2019; UN Secretary-General, “Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in the CAR”, UN, 28.11.2014, available at [digitallibrary.un.org/record/784128](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/784128); Elizabeth Murray / Rachel Sullivan, “Central African Republic’s Disputed Elections Exacerbate Rising Tensions,” *United States Institute of Peace*, 07.01.2021, available at [usip.org/publications/2021/01/central-african-republics-disputed-elections-exacerbate-rising-tensions](https://usip.org/publications/2021/01/central-african-republics-disputed-elections-exacerbate-rising-tensions).



Led by President Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of Congo, the so-called “international mediation in the CAR crisis” convened the conflict parties at a peace forum in Brazzaville in July 2014 to negotiate a cessation of hostilities agreement. An agenda was set briefly ahead of the meeting, mainly through consultations among international stakeholders. The terms of the agreement were to be negotiated by three committees, one of them a DDR committee. The discussion of issues related to power- and wealth-sharing was not foreseen. On the first day of the forum the armed groups presented a list of requests that they wanted to discuss. These included obtaining ministerial posts in a new government and the integration of members of armed groups into the FACA.<sup>69</sup> DDR experts briefed the mediation that leaving these issues unaddressed would lead to a reluctance of groups in the northeast to disarm, as four years of negotiations in the National DDR Steering Committee had shown. This would lead to another failed DDR process – the third in the country. When the forum proceeded without taking the requests put forward by the ex-*Séléka* into account, the members of this former coalition walked out of the negotiations in protest. Despite this *éclat* the committees negotiated the terms of a cessation of hostilities agreement, but without the participation of ex-*Séléka* delegates. Bilateral negotiations between members of the international mediation and representatives of armed groups on the last night of the forum finally led to the signing of an agreement on 23 July 2014.<sup>70</sup>

The *“Accord de Cessation des Hostilités en République Centrafricaine”* includes three provisions aimed at preparing a DDR program: voluntary regroupment, repatriation, and definition of armed group membership. The international community also agreed that moving forward, the priority was to work towards an agreement on DDR to be signed at a separate forum.

Three months after the Brazzaville agreement entered into force, the UN reported numerous violations. It acknowledged that it “proved difficult to implement its provisions, including the one on the voluntary regroupment of armed groups”.<sup>71</sup> In his report to the UN Security Council in November

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69 Other grievances relate to the issuing of identity cards for populations in the northeast, an issue identified as crucial to local populations. The discrimination against Muslims as “non-Central Africans” has often led to violent local conflict. Brown/Zahar, *Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic*, p. 16. Although this discrimination is used by some armed group leaders to mobilize political allies and recruit youth, it is also representative of intercommunal hostility and could have been addressed as a legitimate driver of conflict. Interview with UN official, 2018.

70 Phone interview with former UN official, 7 April 2020.

71 UN Secretary-General, *The Situation in the CAR*, p. 6 (para. 22).

2014, the Secretary-General emphasized that there was “an urgent need for a follow-on political process with inclusive consultations at the national and local levels”.<sup>72</sup>

This was meant to happen at the Bangui Forum, which took place from 4–11 May 2015. The Bangui Forum had two dimensions. First, “grass-root consultations” were conducted starting in January 2015. Their outcomes were broadly reflected in the “Pacte Républicain”, a declaration adopted at the Forum by acclamation. Second, an agreement on the “principles of DDRR (demobilization, disarmament, reinsertion and repatriation) and integration” also referred to as the “DDRR agreement” was negotiated. This agreement was signed by the main armed groups and laid out broader guidance and technical aspects of a future DDR process. The content of the agreement was based on the traditional DDR approach, against the advice of DDR experts that its implementation would become highly problematic.<sup>73</sup> Neither the DDRR agreement nor the *Pacte Républicain* substantially addressed grievances presented by the armed groups ahead and during the forum, even though a number of them could have been linked to the root causes of conflict. The question of integrating members of armed groups into the national defense forces – one of the armed groups’ main request and a contested political issue for years – was treated as a technical matter. The DDR agreement states that integration would be based on the official national selection criteria and be decided on an individual basis (Art. 7). No agreement on quotas or other modalities was discussed. This meant that a majority of members of armed groups would be disqualified from the outset, for example because they would be unable to meet the educational requirements.

As during the Libreville peace process, the armed groups were told that the President would hold consultations with them after the signing of the agreement to address their main grievances, a promise that was not backed by serious commitment. This considerably lowered the chances for the ex-*Séléka* to engage seriously in the DDR process, as they not only knew that they could refuse to disarm, but they had also already succeeded once before in using their leverage to oust a president from power.

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72 Ibid., p.16 (para. 68).

73 Phone interview with former UN CAR official, 7 April 2020.

## The UN Mission's Approach to DDR Implementation

The Security Council mandated the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to support the government in implementing the DDRR agreement and the *Pacte Républicain*. MINUSCA briefed the main donor for DDR in the CAR, the World Bank, and members of the International Contact Group on the possibility of implementing a traditional DDR program. As three of the four pre-conditions for traditional DDR were not in place, and based on an analysis of the failed 2008–2012 DDR process, MINUSCA noted that such a program could not be implemented until the ex-Séléka leadership and members of armed groups had been fully brought into the DDR agreement and the region in the northeast was sufficiently safe and secure to proceed with the disarmament of the groups.<sup>74</sup> As an outcome of the discussions, the World Bank decided to make the disbursement of its funds for DDR to the government dependent on a political agreement that had the trust of the groups to be disarmed – a significant step for a key DDR donor.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time, expectations from the Bangui Forum's signing of the DDRR agreement were high. So was political pressure from international and regional stakeholders to launch the DDR process, as they believed it would create a secure environment for elections. In response to this, MINUSCA designed the “pre-DDR” program, which was launched only a few months after the Bangui Forum, in November 2015. Community-based activities were organized in eight hotspot locations across the country, including (1) disarmament (registration, weapons storage, and management); (2) economic reinsertion support (food, cash-for-work, income generating activities, and on-the-job vocational training); (3) support to inclusive local dialogue on security issues (local security committees), and (4) the promotion of social cohesion through “peace days”.

In order to launch these activities in areas controlled by armed groups, MINUSCA approached these groups' leaders and engaged in local dialogues. Anti-Balaka leader Ngaïssona agreed to let 1,500 of his members enroll, likely because he wanted to demonstrate a commitment to the overall peace process, which was often publicly questioned by the government. At the same time, armed groups reiterated that an enrolment in the “official” DDRR program would be dependent on successful negotiations with the govern-

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74 Interview with UN DDR official, New York, 18 December 2018.

75 Ibid.

ment on their “list of requests”. A year after its launch, almost 5,000 ex-combatants were registered as pre-DDR participants, with a considerable number of small firearms collected, including artisanal weapons and explosive devices. A mid-term review conducted by a third party found that the program had a “direct positive and visible impact on local economies” and a “ground-breaking” effect on social cohesion, citing, for example, the fact that members of different armed groups were working alongside each other and that communities developed their own conflict-resolution mechanisms to address tensions.<sup>76</sup> In Resolution 2301 (2016), the Security Council commended MINUSCA for the implementation of the pre-DDR program, stating that it reduced the presence of members of armed groups.<sup>77</sup> The Security Council also recognized that there was a need for more dialogue, and it extended the DDR mandate to support the authorities in addressing the root causes of conflict.<sup>78</sup>

Encouraged by the success of pre-DDR and faced with the need to build the trust of armed groups and communities in the peace process further, MINUSCA decided to roll out CVR projects to create the pre-conditions for traditional DDR (see above, chapter one). By October 2019, 22,100 beneficiaries were enrolled in CVR projects across the country. To ensure pre-DDR remained temporary in nature, MINUSCA ended the program in 2017, ahead of the launch of a DDR pilot project. Pre-DDR activities were transitioned into CVR projects to preserve the gains made at the community-level.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, the UN Mission continued to emphasize that neither CVR nor pre-DDR programs could lead to long-term peace, and that it was important to reach an agreement on the key grievances expressed by the armed groups. Recognizing that in the absence of such an agreement DDR could not proceed, the Security Council called for further dialogue and negotiations with the armed groups.<sup>80</sup>

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76 The review also pointed out that the employment of mid-level commanders as supervisors of the cash for work activities was a model that should be considered for other contexts. It even went so far as concluding that the success of pre-DDR surpassed the success of the reintegration phase of some traditional DDR programs. Transition International, Mid-term review, CAR pre-DDR program (internal document), p. 2.

77 “Welcoming the successful conduct of pre-DDR activities which have contributed to reduce the presence of members of armed groups...” See: UN Security Council, “Resolution 2301 (2016),” *UN*, 2016, p. 4, available at [digitallibrary.un.org/record/835089](http://digitallibrary.un.org/record/835089).

78 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

79 Online interview with MINUSCA Official, 16 May 2018.

80 The official DDR program was finally launched on 17 December 2018.

## Proliferation of Track One Mediation and Bilateral Initiatives

The call by the Security Council for further dialogue led to three new mediation initiatives: the first by Sant'Egidio and the European Union in 2016; the second and most comprehensive one by ECCAS, the African Union, and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), now called the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR); and a third launched by the Russian Federation and Sudan in 2018.<sup>81</sup> The Sant'Egidio agreement was broken in the first few hours after it was signed and was considered a “non-event” in Bangui.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, the newly elected government received support from various partners, including China, the European Union, France, the Russian Federation, the United States, and the UN to reform, train, and equip the FACA.<sup>83</sup> MINUSCA continued to emphasize the need to address the issue of integration of members of armed groups in the armed forces, yet by August 2020, only 232 individuals – known to be members of the ex-*Séléka* – had been integrated, as most applicants from the northeast did not meet the official entry criteria. At the same time, some ex-*Séléka* factions continued strongly to oppose the deployments of the FACA to the regions.<sup>84</sup> Fighting continued throughout the country, and violence reached a new peak in July 2017.

## The African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR)

With violence peaking in 2017, African governments and organizations decided to launch the APPR to encourage a resumption of the dialogue between the armed groups and the government. It was led by the African Union, ECCAS, and the ICGLR, with the support of Angola, Chad, and the

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81 On 28 August 2018, a meeting was convened in Khartoum with the three main ex-*Séléka* factions and one anti-*Balaka* faction, with the support of the Russian Federation. This followed an earlier meeting in Khartoum on 10 July of that year which only the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic (FPRC) attended. The second meeting resulted in a declaration by which armed factions pledged their support for peace and dialogue within the framework of the APPR. The EU and France felt that these talks were undermining the APPR. This led to a dispute between France and Russia and tensions in the Security Council over the renewal of MINUSCA's mandate, over which Russia and China abstained. See: ICG, *Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick*, pp. 5–6.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

83 As of 1 October 2020, a total of 1,100 FACA personnel trained by the EU Training Mission were deployed to the provinces. The Russian security firm Wagner deployed 200 personnel, as well as a Close Protection Unit for President Touadéra. Bangui and Moscow signed a military agreement in 2018, which has seen the FACA receive armaments, vehicles, communications and other equipment. Phone interview UN Official, 14 October 2020; ICG, *Making the Central African Republic's Latest Peace Agreement Stick*, p.4.

84 UN Secretary-General, *The Situation in the CAR*, pp. 5–6 (para. 21); Interview with UN official, 2020.

Republic of Congo. The initiative reoriented the design of the mediation process, relative to former agreements, by focusing on what could realistically be achieved and changing the role of the armed groups in the peace process. Its goal was to achieve the groups' disarmament in return for political commitments. The "Political Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation" (*Accord Politique pour la Paix et la Réconciliation, APPR*) signed on 6 February 2019 in Bangui contains three main elements: (1) power-sharing with armed groups through the appointment of an inclusive government; (2) the possibility of sanctions against those who continue to use violence; (3) the establishment of "special mixed security units" under FACA command, and composed of national security and defense forces and vetted and trained members of armed groups that have disarmed and demobilized.<sup>85</sup> The agreement also established a full-fledged monitoring and implementation mechanism, which includes conflict resolution mechanisms at the local and national levels.<sup>86</sup> At the local level (*préfectures*), technical security committees, including members of armed groups and representatives of the FACA and national security forces, were established to address local-level obstacles and conflicts resulting from the implementation of the agreement's provisions.<sup>87</sup>

Implementation of the agreement was at first hindered by the parties' hesitation to adhere to its provisions, as well as a lack of clarity on how to sequence key provisions related to the newly established mechanisms with already existing programs.<sup>88</sup> Implementation of the provisions regarding the special mixed security units proved difficult because of the resistance of the FACA and confusion among the conflict parties and the international community on how to fund and sequence them with the DDR program.<sup>89</sup>

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85 The negotiation of the agreement was challenged by the Russian-Sudanese mediation initiative that took place around the same time, but by September 2018, the AU's diplomatic efforts and pressure by the EU and Western partners succeeded in incorporating those talks into the APPR. President Touadéra appeared to have done nothing to coordinate the Russian-Sudanese talks with African Union initiative before September 2018 and seemed content to allow Russia to proceed in parallel. At the same time, he was receiving material support from Russia to rebuilding the FACA. See: ICG, (2019), pp. 5–6.

86 James Henry Murray / Claude Bizimana, *Implementation Mechanisms for the Central African Republic Peace Agreement*, accord.org.za, 2020, available at [accord.org.za/news/implementation-mechanisms-for-the-central-african-republic-peace-agreement](https://accord.org.za/news/implementation-mechanisms-for-the-central-african-republic-peace-agreement).

87 Interview with UN official, Geneva, 4 August 2020.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

## Impact on Conflict Dynamics<sup>90</sup>

The adoption of the four major peace deals – the Libreville agreement, the Brazzaville cessation of hostilities, the DDRR agreement at the Bangui Forum, and the APPR – were generally followed by periods of relative stability. When the momentum created by peace talks wore off, renewed fighting broke out, with the armed groups voicing frustration over the same grievances they had presented to the government in each round of talks. Although the APPR includes power-sharing provisions and takes a new approach to tackling security and state weakness, it was signed after seven failed mediation initiatives and leaves key questions such as resource management unanswered. Armed groups have therefore continued their illicit extraction activities and committed violent acts against civilians.

The government's half-hearted attempts at establishing the state as a service provider in the northeast – which consisted of a small number of officials being sent from Bangui without prior consultation with armed groups and without the means to do their work – have been rejected.<sup>91</sup> The central government has instead focused on training, equipping, and deploying the FACA and security forces to the northeast and the northwest.<sup>92</sup> The official DDR program was launched, but it has made limited progress. Even where locally mediated agreements helped to reduce violence, armed groups have remained ready to engage in new attacks.<sup>93</sup> During the electoral period in December 2020 / January 2021, the *Coalition des Patriotes pour le Changement (CPC)*, a coalition of groups that signed the APPR, attacked Bangui and several cities across the country. The eruption of violence has been called the “gravest threat” to the APPR so far and prompted calls for the negotiation of a new ceasefire.<sup>94</sup>

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90 This covers the period until 1 February 2021.

91 In Kaga-Bandoro, a newly built prefect's office, which was financed with international support, was destroyed after a prefect who was not welcomed by the armed groups and community members took office. Interview with UN mediation official, 2018. For the case of Bambari, see: ICG, *Avoiding the Worst in the Central African Republic*, p. 9.

92 In light of the role of the FACA in the conflict, this deployment needs to be critically observed. Armed groups have had different reactions to it: the Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC) in Kaga-Bandoro welcomed it, the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic (FPRC) only agreed to it after bilateral negotiations with its military leader, while the UPC is opposed to it. Interview with UN official, Geneva, 4 August 2020.

93 One example is a local peace agreement signed by six armed groups in Bria in April 2019. See: Arthur Boutellis / Delphine Mechoulan / Marie-Joëlle Zahar, “Parallel Tracks or Connected Pieces? UN Peace Operations, Local Mediation, and Peace Processes,” *International Peace Institute*, 2020, p. 11, available at [ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2012-UN-Peace-Operations-Local-Mediation-and-Peace-Processes.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2012-UN-Peace-Operations-Local-Mediation-and-Peace-Processes.pdf).

94 Murray/Sullivan, *Central African Republic's Disputed Elections*.

# Libya

Libya's current state fragility can be traced back to the times of Colonel Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Qaddafi. The Libyan *Jamabiriya* was organized based on Qaddafi's personal and ideological vision where state institutions were not more than a façade.<sup>95</sup> As corruption and favoritism reigned, a climate of distrust developed over the years both among the population *vis-à-vis* state institutions and between different groups of the population.<sup>96</sup>

Timeline: Libya<sup>97</sup>



**February – November 2011** Libyan uprising ends 42 years of Qaddafi dictatorship

**March 2011** National Transitional Council (NTC) formed

**December 2011** NTC starts paying militias to act as security providers

**July 2012** First elections in Libya to form General National Congress (GNC)

**February – May 2014** Military leader Haftar announces the suspension of the GNC; his "Libyan National Army" (LNA) launches military assaults in Benghazi

**June 2014** Elections to the House of Representatives (HoR). A civil war breaks out when the GNC refuses to resign. The HoR moves to Tobruk.

**December 2015** Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) signed in Skhirat; Presidential Council (PC) and Government of National Accord (GNA) established and recognized by the UN

**4 April 2019** Haftar's LNA lays siege to Tripoli

**End of April / May 2020** LNA forces suffer defeats and have to end their siege

**19 January 2020** Berlin Conference on Libya

**23 October 2020** Ceasefire signed in Geneva

**7 November 2020** Start of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF)

95 ICG, "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (V): Making Sense of Libya," *ICG*, 06.06.2011, p. 4, available at [crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/popular-protest-north-africa-and-middle-east-v-making-sense-libya](https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/popular-protest-north-africa-and-middle-east-v-making-sense-libya).

96 Ibid. pp. 1, 14.

97 ICG, "Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts," *ICG*, 14.09.2012, available at [crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/divided-we-stand-libya-s-enduring-conflicts](https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/divided-we-stand-libya-s-enduring-conflicts); Muriel Asseburg / Wolfram Lacher / Mareike Transfeld, "Mission Impossible? UN Mediation in Libya, Syria and Yemen," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, 2018, available at [swp-berlin.org/en/publication/mission-impossible-un-mediation-in-libya-syria-and-yemen](https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/mission-impossible-un-mediation-in-libya-syria-and-yemen); Tarek Megerisi, "Geostrategic Dimensions of Libya's Civil War," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 2020, available at [africacenter.org/publication/geostrategic-dimensions-libya-civil-war](https://www.africacenter.org/publication/geostrategic-dimensions-libya-civil-war); United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), *Libyan Political Dialogue Forum*, unmissions.org, 2020, available at [unmissions.org/libyan-political-dialogue-forum](https://unmissions.org/libyan-political-dialogue-forum). Peter Bartu, "The Corridor of Uncertainty", in: Peter Cole / Brian McQuinn (eds.), *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 31–54.



Qaddafi dissolved the Ministry of Defense after an attempted coup in December 1969 and kept the state's official armed forces deliberately weak, as he considered them a potential threat to his power. With an estimated strength of 25,000 in a country of 1.8 million square kilometers – the fourth largest in Africa – the armed forces had no significant middle-ranking corps, and most of the rank and file were poorly trained.<sup>98</sup> To guarantee his own security, Qaddafi relied on special security forces, like the *Hamza* brigade.<sup>99</sup>

In the eyes of the public, the official political bodies in the Libyan *Jamahiriyah* lacked any efficiency or reliability. They were described as “talking shops tasked with trying to implement seemingly arbitrary decisions” by the regime.<sup>100</sup> The population's trust in the efficiency of state institutions as a provider of administrative and security services was therefore extremely low. The army, more specifically, was considered by many as a “military club” rather than a fighting force.<sup>101</sup>

This already negative image was reinforced during the uprising in 2011, when the army, even though it was in parts opposed to Qaddafi, did not have the military capacity to support the revolutionary brigades in their fight to overthrow the regime. This made the revolutionary fighters, *the thurwar*, the only “heroes” and “martyrs” of the revolution. Their brigades, *the kata'ib*, were untouchable in the immediate aftermath of the uprising, remaining heavily armed and in control of local areas across the country. The army and police were seen as the defeated enemy, which no one wanted to report to for duty or join.

### Security Arrangements from 2012 Onwards

The National Transitional Council (NTC) emerged as the main political body out of the revolution. Yet it was unable to rely on the army or the police over the short- or even medium-term to address the emerging security

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98 ICG, *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East*, p. 5. Qaddafi's regime ensured that the armed forces remained fragmented, divided along community lines, and physically segregated in garrison towns across the country. See ICG, *Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts*, p. 3.

99 The Hamza brigade was composed of members of Qaddafi's own and allied tribes. He also used informal power networks, such as the “men of the tent” and the Revolutionary Committees Movement.

100 ICG, *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East*, p. 9.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

challenges.<sup>102</sup> From early 2012 onwards, communal conflicts that had long been kept at bay by Qaddafi's repressive regime erupted and struggles emerged for the control of smuggling routes, border crossings, oil resources, and major infrastructure.

The NTC therefore decided to rely on the revolutionary brigades to restore security.<sup>103</sup> Militias under commanders who had enjoyed a particularly good reputation during the uprising, and who supported the authority of the NTC, were hired for specific tasks and put on the payroll of the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Interior. The NTC soon went further in institutionalizing this arrangement. The Ministry of Interior formed the Supreme Security Committee (SSC), composed of brigades, to act as armed police units.<sup>104</sup> Other brigades were registered and paid by the Ministry of Defense to support the army in imposing order among warring communities, acting essentially as "rapid-reaction auxiliary forces".<sup>105</sup> Later, a coalition of militias called "Libya Shield" was formed across the country, reporting officially to the chief of staff of the army.<sup>106</sup>

While these arrangements were at first meant to give legitimacy to an arrangement born out of the necessity for security provision by loyal revolutionaries, the government, the army, and the police had no control over these groups.<sup>107</sup> In addition, most of the deployments to insecure areas functioned through the building of *ad hoc* coalitions between local military councils and various brigades, a process that not only lacked transparency, but also led to

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102 This reality stood in stark contrast to the NTC's ambition to build "a modern, free and united state" with strong institutions, as presented in its "Vision of a Democratic Libya" in March 2011. This state-centric peacebuilding focus, of which the first two priorities were the organization of elections and the drafting of a constitution, was strongly supported by the international community. See ICG, *Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East*, p. 26.

103 ICG, *Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts*, pp. 1, 6.

104 Entire brigades of revolutionary fighters were integrated into the SSC and preserved their command structures. This led to the creation of parallel chains of command in the SSC and the Ministry of Interior. Online interview with UN official, 14 October 2020. For an analysis of early efforts of the NTC to organize the security provision in Libya, and the tense relationship between the SSC and the Police, see: Ian Martin, "The United Nations' Role in the First Year of the Transition", in: Peter Cole / Brian McQuinn (eds.), *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 137–140.

105 ICG, *Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts*, pp. 1, 8.

106 Some observers go as far as calling the creation of Libya Shield "the original sin" of the NTC. See: Frederic Wehrey, "Ending Libya's Civil War: Reconciling Politics, Rebuilding Security", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 24.09.2014, p. 8, available at [carnegieendowment.org/2014/09/24/ending-libya-s-civil-war-reconciling-politics-rebuilding-security-pub-56741](http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/09/24/ending-libya-s-civil-war-reconciling-politics-rebuilding-security-pub-56741).

107 ICG, *Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts*, p. 8.

a fragmentation of the security landscape.<sup>108</sup> This slowly diminished the population's faith in the capacity of the new state to provide for its security.<sup>109</sup> Different types of armed groups, often with close ties to local communities, developed.<sup>110</sup>

These various arrangements continued after the election of the General National Congress (GNC) in July 2012. Some of Libya's key partners offered to support the establishment of a new army and to train members of the militias abroad in view of their future integration into the army.<sup>111</sup> But as no institutional military planning capacity was in place, it was unknown what role these brigades would have once they returned to Libya.<sup>112</sup> Armed groups proliferated and initiated fighting in order to defend local interests. Many committed human rights violations against minorities such as the displaced people of Tawergha,<sup>113</sup> sometimes while continuing to receive regular monthly payments from the state. Different districts, towns, and regions were divided among different militias. This soon triggered power struggles among enemy militias for control. In the absence of viable national forces, these power struggles escalated, particularly once they were linked to key

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108 The hundreds of armed groups that existed during this period, gave "varying degrees of allegiance to the NTC." The relationships between them were characterized by "complexity and internal tensions." Martin, *The United Nations' Role in the First Year of the Transition*, pp.137–138.

109 ICG, *Divided We Stand: Libya's Enduring Conflicts*, p. 7. Despite their reliance on revolutionary brigades, the NTC acknowledged the risk associated with the existence of heavily armed groups across the country and, as early as December 2011, set up the Warriors Affairs Commission (WAC), an inter-ministerial body under the prime minister's authority, charged with developing a plan for the demobilization and reintegration of fighters. Although supported by the US and the EU, the program did not have a chance to succeed, as there was no clear political commitment to it, the caseload was enormous, and most of the groups did not buy in to their demobilization. For an overview of the WAC and other security sector development initiatives, see: Hamzeh Al-Shadeedi / Erwin van Veen / Jalel Harchaoui, "One Thousand and One Failings: Security Sector Stabilisation and Development in Libya," The Clingendael Institute, 02.04.2020, available at [clingendael.org/pub/2020/one-thousand-and-one-failings](http://clingendael.org/pub/2020/one-thousand-and-one-failings).

110 Tim Eaton et al. *The Development of Libyan Armed Groups since 2014: Community Dynamics and Economic Interests*, (London: Chatham House, 2020) pp. 7–9, available at [chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/CHJH8001-Libya-RP-WEB-200316.pdf](http://chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/CHJH8001-Libya-RP-WEB-200316.pdf); Martin, *The United Nations' Role in the First Year of the Transition*, pp.137–138.

111 Among the bilateral initiatives that took place was military training for members of militias offered by bilateral partners. This approach turned out to be both unsustainable and detrimental to the reputation of the Libyan authorities. The participants in the program committed violent actions while on training abroad. Phone interview with UN official, 26 November 2018.

112 Online interview with UN official, 14 October 2020. This engagement by bilateral actors in Libya has recently been described as an intervention that "risks becoming part of the conflict." Al-Shadeedi / van Veen / Harchaoui, *One Thousand and One Failings*, p.25.

113 "Libya: Bolster Security at Tawergha Camps," *Human Rights Watch*, 05.03.2012, available at [hrw.org/news/2012/03/05/libya-bolster-security-tawergha-camps](http://hrw.org/news/2012/03/05/libya-bolster-security-tawergha-camps).

political decisions. This allowed political leaders to attract militias over to their side and use “institutionalized violence as a political tool.”<sup>114</sup>

### From State Weakness to Civil War

In the general elections to the House of Representatives of July 2014, pro-Islamist candidates that were associated with revolutionary groups emerged with far fewer seats than secular candidates, which were associated with the former regime.<sup>115</sup> This came as a surprise to a number of pro-revolutionary groups. They refused to accept the results and declared the new parliament unconstitutional, which meant the GNC continued to exist in Tripoli. This provoked a political conflict that resulted in the newly elected members of the House of Representatives moving to Tobruk. A majority of the members lent their support to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, the commander of the “Libyan National Army” (LNA).<sup>116</sup> The move to Tobruk started to shift the very fragmented “multipolar” security landscape to a bipolar one, along the lines of the historical east-west divide.<sup>117</sup> Militias supporting the GNC formed one alliance, called “Libya Dawn”, which was composed of fighters from Misrata, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, Salafists, and Berber tribes. This faced an enemy coalition led by Haftar composed of fighters from Zintan, Eastern tribes in favor of federalism, anti-Islamists, former Qaddafi supporters, and non-Arab minorities from the South. Libya was thus divided into two, with different militias supporting two different parliaments, each with its own government and external backers (see below).<sup>118</sup> In February 2014, Haftar announced the dissolution of the GNC in a TV address. His appeal to urge Libyans to revolt against the GNC was first seen by many as a failed coup attempt. However, on 16 May 2014, he launched a military offensive on Benghazi called “Libya Dignity”. The fighting between the two coalitions brought about a civil war. Violent fighting, which led to hundreds of deaths and the destruction of key infrastructure such as Tripoli’s airport

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114 Megerisi, *Geostrategic Dimensions of Libya’s Civil War*, p. 3.

115 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

116 Asseburg/Lacher/Transfeld, *Mission Impossible?* p. 20. The Libyan National Army later split into the LNA under Haftar, also referred to as the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), and the Libyan Army, which has been under GNA command since December 2015.

117 Tarek Megerisi, “Libya’s Global Civil War,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 26.06.2019, p. 2, available at [ecfr.eu/publication/libyas\\_global\\_civil\\_war1](http://ecfr.eu/publication/libyas_global_civil_war1).

118 The divides between the two camps are multilayered and complex, sometimes based on which militias fought together in the 2011 uprising. See: ICG, “Libya: Getting Geneva Right,” *ICG*, 16.02.2015, pp. 7–8, available at [crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/libya-getting-geneva-right](http://crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/libya-getting-geneva-right).

continued until a stalemate was reached in 2015.<sup>119</sup> While these hostilities were ongoing, conflicts also occurred in the south between communities about resources, smuggling routes, etc., with the opportunistic switching of sides being a common occurrence.<sup>120</sup>

### The Skhirat Peace Talks

Faced with the escalation of violence and the outbreak of a civil war, the international community attempted to broker a political agreement between the parties, who were identified by their political association to the two parliaments, even though the two camps were said to be “politically too diverse to fit into neat categories”.<sup>121</sup> The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), backed at the time by a unified Security Council, was requested to head a mediation initiative, which led to the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in Skhirat, Morocco in December 2015.

What were the key parameters of this initiative? Participation was determined based on the overall objective of political stability and state-centric peacebuilding.<sup>122</sup> This meant that priority was given to actors working on, or advocating for, democratic institution-building. The objective gained the buy-in of various political and civil society participants in the process but lacked the support of key representatives of armed groups.<sup>123</sup> The priority of the armed groups was the control of infrastructure and natural resources. Originally, this was to be addressed in what the UN process called the “security track”. Yet, this track was abandoned in mid-2015, against the advice of senior international security experts.<sup>124</sup> When this happened, the armed groups no longer had a stake in the process. Security was to be regulated by a temporary security committee to be set up after the signing of the agreement. As armed groups became marginalized actors in the peace talks, they

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119 Asseburg/Lacher/Transfeld, *Mission Impossible?*, p. 16.

120 Ibid., p. 18.

121 Ibid., p. 20.

122 The dialogue was based on four principles: (1) ensuring the democratic rights of the Libyan people; (2) the need for a consensual government based on the principle of the separation of powers, oversight, and the balance between them; (3) the need to empower state institutions like the Government of National Accord so that they can address the serious challenges ahead; and (4) respect for the Libyan judiciary and its independence. See: *Libyan Political Agreement*, unmissions.org, 17.12.2015, p. 2, available at [unsmil.unmissions.org/libyan-political-agreement](https://unsmil.unmissions.org/libyan-political-agreement).

123 Online interview with UN official, 14 October 2020.

124 According to one official, who strongly advised the mediation against abandoning the security track, the decision was taken to leave the security issue for later, as it would have made it much more difficult to get a deal. Phone interview with UN official, 5 March 2019. See also Annex 6 of the *Libyan Political Agreement*.

eyed the mediation process with disapproval and grew unwilling to support it, which translated into a major loss of trust in the peace process.<sup>125</sup>

In terms of substance, the agreement that was signed focused on settling issues between the two parliaments, with much of its content revolving around the definition of the role of state institutions and the commitment to elections and a constitutional process. The agreement declares that from the time it is signed, the GNA would have “full power and control over all the Libyan territory” (Art. 30 [1]); the army and police would be the only legitimate security providers (Art. 33); armed groups would be requested to withdraw from territory and infrastructure they control and regroup; and all weapons would be collected by the army and security institutions (Art. 38–42). Under “additional provisions” the agreement sets out guiding principles for a “national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program” (Art. 6). Provisions on power- and wealth-sharing that relate to territory, resources such as oil fields, or infrastructure controlled by armed groups are absent from the agreement.<sup>126</sup> Through its provisions, the LPA provides the framework for a comprehensive political process in a post-conflict context. While it limits the DDR provisions to overall guidelines, it doesn’t provide a vision on how an environment conducive for the disarmament of armed groups can be created. The question is therefore whether it sufficiently addresses the complex security and power dynamics in a country largely controlled by militias and their political backers.

### Impact on Conflict Dynamics

From the moment it was signed, observers criticized that the LPA held “little local legitimacy”.<sup>127</sup> Its main challenge was that it did not provide the modalities for its provisions to be implemented. While UNSMIL succeeded in supporting the parties in forming the GNA and the Presidential Council, these bodies were never really able to impose their authority. When the GNA entered Tripoli, the absence of effective interim security arrangements proved fatal.<sup>128</sup> In order to start operating, the GNA had to make deals with

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125 Online interview with UN official, 14 October 2020.

126 Asseburg/Lacher/Transfeld, *Mission Impossible?* pp. 15, 23.

127 Megerisi, *Geostrategic Dimensions of Libya’s Civil War*, p. 4.

128 Brian McQuinn, *After the Fall, Libya’s Evolving Armed Groups*, (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2012) p. 7, available at [smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/F-Working-papers/SAS-WP12-After-the-Fall-Libya.pdf](http://smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/F-Working-papers/SAS-WP12-After-the-Fall-Libya.pdf).

a number of local militias.<sup>129</sup> Choosing certain militias meant alienating their enemies. The Zintan brigades, key actors during the revolution, soon felt that the GNA had allied itself with the militias in control at their expense, even though the Zintan forces had participated in the Skhirat negotiations and expressed interests and concerns in regards to the peace process.<sup>130</sup> This led to a polarization among militias within Tripoli, either supporting or opposing the GNA, with both sides holding considerable military power. The GNA had no legitimacy in the eyes of opposing military and allied political supporters.

UNSMIL was committed to the LPA and decided that in order to support its implementation, it would support the institutions the agreement created. UNSMIL's open support to the GNA meant that in the eyes of the eastern Libyan coalition, the mission was not only supporting governmental structures, but it was backing a group of controversial militia leaders.<sup>131</sup> Some observers go as far as to say that due to the dependency of the GNA on local militias, UNSMIL's support meant it was taking sides in the conflict. UNSMIL subsequently saw its role as an impartial mediator questioned by important political and military actors.<sup>132</sup> This only changed when UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ghassan Salamé distanced himself from the GNA and created a new, inclusive political process aimed at the organization of a national conference.<sup>133</sup>

### The Role of Foreign States

The bipolar divide in Libya's political and security landscape reaches far beyond its national borders. From the beginning of the conflict, foreign states with geopolitical interests have played a significant role, as Libya does not only have significant oil and gas reserves, but it is also strategically situated

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129 Asseburg/Lacher/Transfeld, *Mission Impossible?* p. 24.

130 McQuinn, *After the Fall*, pp. 7, 8.

131 Asseburg/Lacher/Transfeld, *Mission Impossible?* p. 25.

132 Phone interview with UN official, 5 March 2019.

133 Asseburg/Lacher/Transfeld, *Mission Impossible?* p. 26; Megerisi, *Geostrategic Dimensions of Libya's Civil War*, p. 5. The preparation of the National Conference, launched in September 2017, was meant to bring a broad range of Libyan actors together, in order to form consensus on the constitution, elections, and the role of national institutions. Planned for mid-April 2019, it was indefinitely postponed two weeks prior, when Haftar's LNA launched their offensive on Tripoli, leaving Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Libya Ghassan Salamé "painfully disappointed." *Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Libya, Ghassan Salamé, on the National Conference*, unmissions.org, 09.04.2019, available at [unsmil.unmissions.org/statement-special-representative-secretary-general-libya-ghassan-salam%C3%A9-national-conference](https://unsmil.unmissions.org/statement-special-representative-secretary-general-libya-ghassan-salam%C3%A9-national-conference).

between Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.<sup>134</sup> Groups in the east and the LNA have for a long time enjoyed the support of Egypt, France, Russia, Saudi-Arabia, the United Arab Emirates. Haftar's offensive in 2014 was supported by airstrikes from Egypt with Emirati planes.<sup>135</sup> Haftar's allies have often justified their support by calling it necessary in the fight against terrorism.<sup>136</sup>

Armed groups in the west and the GNA are linked to Italy, Turkey, and Qatar.<sup>137</sup> Italy is concerned by the migration of refugees reaching the country via Libya, an issue of concern that they share with armed groups in the west. At the same time, Italy is also an important political and trade partner to Libya, a position it aims to keep.<sup>138</sup> Turkey's role gained considerable importance in the spring of 2020, when their air support to the GNA made a significant difference in chasing Haftar's LNA, who were backed by about 1,500 members of the Russian security firm Wagner, from the outskirts of Tripoli.

### **Proliferation of Track One Mediation Initiatives**

In the political vacuum created by the obstacles to the LPA's implementation, a number of bilateral track one mediation initiatives were launched that made an already challenging situation even more complex. These included efforts by the African Union, Algeria, Egypt, France, Russia and Tunisia in the form of calls for ceasefires, elections and the adoption of a constitution, often with unrealistic deadlines.<sup>139</sup> Following the failed attempt at holding the National Conference in April 2019, initiatives were mainly aimed at overcoming competition among international stakeholders and to stop a proxy war. To this end, the German government convened a conference on Libya in Berlin on 19 January 2020. It momentarily reinjected new momentum into the process by gaining a commitment from participants<sup>140</sup> to strengthen their efforts to reach a ceasefire, respect and implement the UN

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134 Megerisi, *Geostrategic Dimensions of Libya's Civil War*, p. 3.

135 Wehrey, *Ending Libya's Civil War*, p. 24.

136 Emadeddin Badi, *Exploring Armed Groups in Libya: Perspectives on Security Sector Reform in a Hybrid Environment*, (Geneva: DCAF, 2020), p. 21, available at [dcaf.ch/exploring-armed-groups-libya-perspectives-ssr-hybrid-environment](https://dcaf.ch/exploring-armed-groups-libya-perspectives-ssr-hybrid-environment).

137 Megerisi, *Geostrategic Dimensions of Libya's Civil War*, pp. 2–3.

138 Megerisi, *Geostrategic Dimensions of Libya's Civil War*, p. 8.

139 Elections, which were to take place in December 2018, had to be postponed when Haftar's LNA marched towards Tripoli.

140 The US, UK, France, Italy, Germany, Algeria, Turkey, Congo-Brazzaville, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, China, the African Union, the Arab League, the EU and the UN.



arms embargo, and work towards renewed negotiations. The 5+5 Committee set up shortly after the Berlin conference in Geneva prepared a ceasefire, signed on 23 October 2020, requesting the withdrawal of armed groups and units “from all lines of contact”.<sup>141</sup> As a next step, the “Libyan Political Dialogue Forum”, facilitated by UNSMIL, was set up. It provides a new framework for peace negotiations. Launched on 7 November 2020, it adopted a roadmap that led to the vote of a new temporary executive authority on 5 February 2021. National elections are planned for 24 December 2021.<sup>142</sup>

### Evolution of the conflict<sup>143</sup>

Following early difficulties in implementing the LPA, the conflict intensified, being fueled by factors including external support to the two sides. Haftar’s LNA reached Tripoli at the end of March 2019 and beleaguered the city until the end of May 2020. Within Tripoli, ministers and employees of ministries in the territories under the control of militias were subject to extortions that allowed armed groups to dictate the decisions of state institutions, which were not equipped to deal with the enormous security crisis facing the capital and the country.<sup>144</sup> Hundreds of civilians were killed after the LNA started its offensive on Tripoli. Multiple mass-graves were found in early June 2020.<sup>145</sup> According to the UN, as of 24 March 2021, 1.3 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>146</sup> Two months before the appointment of the temporary executive authority led by Abdul Hamid Debeibah, observers reported that the conflict parties were building up their military capacities and preparing for the next phase of the conflict.<sup>147</sup> It remains to be seen, whether the fragile security situation will allow Debeibah’s cabinet to organize the elections planned for December 2021.

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141 A joint subcommittee is mandated to review all armed groups and classify them, an endeavor that in the words of one official “may take years.” Phone interview with UN official, 21 January 2021.

142 ICG, “Foreign Actors Drive Military Build-up amid Deadlocked Political Talks,” ICG, 24.12.2020, available at [crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/crisis-group-libya-update-2](https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/crisis-group-libya-update-2).

143 This covers the period up to 15 March 2021.

144 For more details on how armed groups infiltrated state institutions after the signing of the LPA, see: Badi, *Exploring Armed Groups in Libya*, p.28.

145 UN, *Statement Attributable to the Spokesman for the Secretary-General on Libya*, un.org, 12.06.2020, available at [un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-06-12/statement-attributable-the-spokesman-for-the-secretary-general-libya](https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-06-12/statement-attributable-the-spokesman-for-the-secretary-general-libya).

146 “Libya: Situation Report,” *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs*, 12.04.2021, available at [reports.unocha.org/en/country/libya](https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/libya).

147 ICG, *Foreign Actors Drive Military Build-up amid Deadlocked Political Talks*, pp.1–4; Megerisi, *Spoiler Alert*, p.2.

## Insights from the CAR and Libya Peace Processes

To analyze how third parties engaged armed groups in the different phases of the peace negotiations in the CAR and Libya, we will use the questions developed for the ACCP framework for mediation (see section three). From this we can draw six insights that illustrate how the role of armed groups in peace processes may play out in extremely fragile contexts.

### **Insight 1 – *Objective*: Consulting relevant armed groups to define a common and realistic objective for the talks**

A common and realistic objective shared by all the parties involved in a conflict is one of the key conditions for a successful mediation process. A commonality between the processes in the CAR and Libya was that the objective was defined in close consultation with political actors and international and regional stakeholders. They prioritized the implementation of state-centric peacebuilding, with elections as the first milestone, and requested the DDR of armed groups. Armed groups who constituted major conflict parties were not aligned with this objective as they wanted to negotiate the terms of their disarmament, thereby making it conditional on concessions by the government party. It is understandable, for example, in the case of Libya that the mediation chose the objective they did. The conflict had escalated as a consequence of a political crisis, in which various state institutions and external actors played a major role. Therefore, getting the political actors and regional stakeholders to agree on one objective was extremely challenging in itself. At the same time, the case studies show that the high degree of inherited state weakness and insecurity made the objective of comprehensive “top-down” institution building unrealistic from the outset, unless the armed groups and their supporters were to cooperate and voluntarily disarm. To get to this point would have required aligning the objective of the talks with the armed groups and consulting them on how they would envision their role in the peace process and beyond.

### **Insight 2 – *Actors*: Engaging relevant armed group representatives and understanding their group’s motivation and capacity to negotiate**

There are multiple reasons behind the reluctance to bring armed group representatives to peace talks, even if there is consensus that this is essential. One reason is the concern that one gives such groups legitimacy. Some mediators and organizations sponsoring talks also assume that political actors

control the security actors, and that solving the political situation first would make it easier to solve the security one. Yet security actors may also shape what political actors can and cannot do, particularly in states with extremely weak institutions.<sup>148</sup> Their influence extends to the ability to create a secure environment – where institution building, starting with elections – can take place. When the security track was abandoned in Libya in mid-2015, some of the most relevant actors with power bases and who controlled key areas of the country were excluded from the peace talks, even though they were powerful in shaping events on the ground. Agreements in Libya and the CAR declare the state's security and defense forces are the official security providers in the countries. Yet, in both cases, it will take many years to develop, reform, and redeploy these forces so they can play this role.<sup>149</sup> In the meantime, armed groups can remain in control, allowing violent fighting to escalate.

The cases of the CAR and Libya have shown that not involving armed groups in negotiations, or limiting their participation to security talks, can be short-sighted. Ignoring their requests means that the implementation of key agreement provisions may not work.

This being said, the decision of which representatives of armed groups to include is not an easy one. In both the CAR and Libya, the fragmentation and disintegration of armed group structures and the complex web of shifting alliances made it challenging to clarify participation. Yet this complexity is not limited to the armed groups, it extends to the political actors and external stakeholders. The overall complexity of relationships makes it necessary to invest time in identifying the right interlocutors and building their capacity to negotiate. The lack of inclusion in peace talks of armed groups provokes a reaction – far too often a violent one, directed at the civilian population. This can throw the parties back to sustained fighting that costs lives or to new peace talks.

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148 One report from the beginning of the Libyan civil war in 2014 describes the reversed power balance between state and armed groups as follows: "Since the end of Gaddafi's one-man rule, the main rival militias of ex-rebels have become de-facto powerbrokers in the vacuum of Libya's political chaos, carving out fiefdoms and exercising their military muscle to make demands on the state." Ahmed Elumami / Ulf Laessing, "Gunmen Loyal to Ex-general Storm Libyan Parliament, Demand Suspension," *Reuters*, 18.05.2014, available at [reuters.com/article/us-libya-violence/gunmen-loyal-to-ex-general-storm-libyan-parliament-demand-suspension-idUSBREA4G04A20140518](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-violence/gunmen-loyal-to-ex-general-storm-libyan-parliament-demand-suspension-idUSBREA4G04A20140518).

149 While the conflict parties in the CAR were ripe for a negotiation in Brazzaville according to Zartman's well-recognized definition of a "mutually hurting stalemate" (see above), what was expected to be negotiated was impossible to be implemented, at least without the full buy-in of the armed groups.

### **Insight 3 – *Content*: Where an asymmetric military power balance is in place, political power- and wealth-sharing negotiations with armed groups are essential**

The hesitance to include non-state armed groups in peace talks is not only limited to the physical representation of their members. There is also a tendency to design the content of negotiations narrowly on state institutions, the holding of elections and a roadmap for selected peacebuilding tasks. This happened in both cases, in the CAR and Libya.<sup>150</sup> Requests by armed groups for political power- and wealth-sharing are often judged illegitimate as their military power and control of resources is generally acquired illegitimately through violence. Yet, as both case studies have shown, governments also often lack legitimacy, and in contexts with an asymmetric military power balance, armed groups will refuse to disarm or demobilize unless they are incentivized to do so and recognized as key actors in the peace process. In such situations, DDR and other forms of voluntary demobilization are not the right tools.

This does not mean any request put forward by armed groups should be accepted by the political actors, but that those grievances linked to the root causes of conflict should be negotiated. In both, Libya and the CAR – to a limited degree, with the exception of the APPR – there were no incentives in the agreements that requested armed groups to enroll in a DDR program, as political power- and wealth-sharing negotiations with representatives of non-state armed groups did not take place.<sup>151</sup> It is understandable that the mediation teams in charge of the processes in the CAR and Libya were driven by the wish to put a legitimate government in control of the country, and thereby stabilize the political and security situation. Yet, as was seen in the case studies, security does not always follow political stability. In extremely fragile contexts, political stability can only be achieved after state institutions have been strengthened to a degree that actually enables the government to govern. Unless one considers defeating armed groups by using external military force, getting to this point requires creating a secure environment by working with armed groups and communities in areas under their control.

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150 In the CAR, the APPR included power-sharing provisions, yet they came late, when the momentum of the 2014 French intervention that created a stalemate had been lost, and when several peace agreements and attempts at their implementation had already led to a loss of trust among the parties in the peace process.

151 Even attempts made by the President of the CAR at Libreville, and later at the Bangui Forum, to “discuss details later” were insufficient to get the armed groups on board (see above).

#### **Insight 4 – Context: Bringing implementation experience into context analysis**

Context analysis is particularly important to ensure an agreement has not only been negotiated by the relevant conflict parties, but also that it can be realistically implemented. Two key context factors in the CAR and Libya make the implementation of peace agreements that follow the traditional state-centric peacebuilding model difficult: (1) the absence of a functioning state and the lack of experience of the population with the state as service provider, and (2) the lack of a security environment which is conducive to such things as building institutions, holding elections, and creating sustainable employment opportunities. Two previously failed DDR processes in the CAR could have been taken as a clear indication that the current context did not lend itself to traditional DDR, yet it took seven more internationally brokered agreements before a new approach was chosen. In Libya, some actors of the international community admitted underestimating the damage to the institutions that the 42 years of Qaddafi's reign had left on society and on the prospects for building a functioning state within a short-term timeframe.<sup>152</sup> Context analysis conducted as part of preparations for mediation or during mediation processes could greatly benefit from the experience of those involved in implementing agreements.<sup>153</sup> While every context is different, circumstances often do not allow the state to establish the monopoly of force, even if the parties sign an agreement that provides for the implementation of a DDR program.<sup>154</sup>

#### **Insight 5 – Process: A context-adapted sequence of steps greatly contributes to the sustainability of agreements**

Process design is where various considerations outlined above come together: participation, objective, agenda, content, format of the negotiations, etc. Process design also means ensuring that agreements that are negotiated contain a sequence for their implementation.

In both the CAR and Libya, a track one approach was chosen to negotiate an agreement that would then be implemented. The agreements con-

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152 Phone interview with UN official, 5 March 2019.

153 Ong, underlines that for post-conflict contexts, it is important to include implementers in the negotiation phase. See: *Managing Fighting Forces*, p.60. This is even more true for the contexts under review, where fighting is still ongoing.

154 Abdi and Mason describe three circumstances under which a state building process may be conflict inducing. See Dekha Ibrahim Abdi / Simon J. A. Mason, *Mediation and Governance in Fragile Contexts: Small Steps to Peace*, (London: Lynne Rienne Publishers, 2019), p. 64.

tain a logic that prioritizes the election of a government. According to standard practice, following the elections, the government will take the lead in rebuilding state institutions, becoming the key partner of the international community. The post-conflict process that follows foresees that the monopoly of force is established by the state, and that security and defense forces are placed in charge of protecting the population from armed violence. This requires the disarmament and demobilization of members of armed groups through a DDR program, and possibly an integration of some of these members into the regular armed and security forces. While this is ongoing, comprehensive institution-building and reform processes are initiated, accompanied by broader reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts.

As the case studies have shown, the lack of basic governance capacity in all sectors and the state of the security and defense forces makes this implementation sequence challenging if not impossible. *Before* DDR with civilian reintegration or integration into the security and armed forces can happen (1) armed groups need to be included in the negotiations and consent to the mediation; (2) armed groups need to agree to their demobilization under conditions to be addressed during the negotiations, most likely as part of power- and wealth-sharing discussions; (3) the security and defense forces need to be built, reformed, trained, and equipped in order to have the capacity to “take over” control from the armed groups in areas where these are the security providers; and (4) attractive alternative employment opportunities have to be created for members of armed groups, including in the security and defense forces, to facilitate their reintegration.

The sequence starts with steps (1) and (2) when a mediation process is designed and continues during the negotiations of an agreement. The next two, steps (3) and (4), are medium- or long-term processes that depend on the situation in the country and may take years to be completed – a key factor that is often underestimated.<sup>155</sup> Many mediated agreements that include DDR and SSR provisions provide insufficient indication in what sequence different steps should be implemented. In contexts where the state is strong, they may happen in parallel. However, in contexts such as Libya and the CAR – where the security and defense forces are weak and their members may have played a role in the conflict – armed groups will not demobilize, unless steps are taken so that the security and defense forces regain control

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<sup>155</sup> The importance of properly sequencing DDR with longer-term security sector development or reform efforts was emphasized by all the mediation advisers involved in the negotiation of security arrangements interviewed for this paper.

and respect in the societies they are meant to protect. Similarly, to make employment in the private sector or public institutions an incentive for members of armed groups requires investing in recovery and development efforts first. In short, starting with the negotiation process, key steps in implementation have to be sequenced for an agreement to provide a realistic vision for peace.

**Insight 6 – *Do no harm*: Critically monitor if violence is re-escalating because major non-state armed actors did not participate in the peace negotiations**

As was seen in both cases, mediated agreements can unintentionally escalate violence, if they are concluded without getting the consent and support of actors who have the power to decide over the security situation in the country. This may happen when the international community exercises pressure on the mediation to get the parties to sign. The proliferation of mediation initiatives triggered by failed agreements is a clear indication that it is not so much the signature under an agreement that matters, but whether the parties are committed to its implementation. In both case studies, a correlation can be observed between the track one approach chosen, the lack of inclusion of major armed groups in the negotiations (Libya) or the refusal to discuss their grievances (CAR), and the escalation of violence. In the CAR, violence escalated a few months after the DDR agreement was signed, with armed groups expressing their frustrations. The UN Security Council subsequently recognized the need for follow-on political and security negotiations. In Libya, the GNA was not able to move to the capital without making deals with local militias. This alienated opposing armed groups, including Haftar's LNA. While the GNA was struggling to exercise its authority, the LNA extended their influence over territory, infrastructure, and natural resources and beleaguered Tripoli for more than a year. In addition, members of the international community involved in mediation processes in Libya backed different sides of the conflict, meaning that the minimum willingness of regional actors required to allow the process to proceed was not present.<sup>156</sup> This shows that mediating through track one to bring about the signature of agreements with provisions that cannot be implemented does harm to the peace process, as it provokes violent reactions from actors who feel alienated.

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<sup>156</sup> UN, *Guidance for Effective Mediation*, p.10.

## Conclusion

The two cases studies illustrate that DDR provisions that have not been negotiated with the key players cannot be implemented. This often happens when peace processes are disconnected from the power and military dynamic on the ground. The peace agreements concluded in the CAR and Libya assigned roles to the armed groups that they were not willing to play and others to the state which it was not capable of performing. While the agreements declare the central state's legitimacy and rebuilding a priority, they do not contain a vision that defines constructive roles for non-state armed groups in this process, even where these actors are in control of large swathes of territory and resources. The main reason for this is that armed groups are either not, or not sufficiently, involved in the mediation processes, and they may sign an agreement under undue pressure, even though they feel its content does not reflect the reality on the ground. Attempts at implementing agreements concluded under these conditions are likely to fail. The state-centric approach to peacebuilding being adopted, with DDR as the program of choice to establish the monopoly of force, is not adapted to dealing with the specific conditions found in active armed conflict. This gravely affects the sustainability of the agreements and ultimately leads to prolonged conflict and the loss of life.



## 4. Exploring Ways Forward

In the last section, we explore ideas on how to shape peace processes in countries where multiple armed groups are in control of territory and natural resources, and state institutions are very ineffective or viewed as lacking legitimacy by the people being governed. While we respond here to the specific challenges of extremely fragile contexts, some elements of this approach could also apply to other conflict environments.

As we have seen, for armed groups and states to move on to the post-conflict phase, both require that certain conditions in the conflict environment change. Armed groups will only effectively disarm when there is a minimum level of security and governance in place and when incentives are provided to their members and communities that address their key grievances. From a central state perspective, the capacity of state institutions needs to be increased before the state can exercise the monopoly of force. Furthermore, armed groups and communities need to develop a relationship of trust, both in the central state as a service provider and in the peace process.

Reaching this point requires the implementation of concrete initiatives that (1) increase the provision of public services provided to local populations in areas controlled by armed groups, with security a priority, and (2) define roles for armed groups and communities in areas under their control that help build their trust in the peace process.<sup>157</sup> The shape of these initiatives and the way they are to be implemented needs to be jointly determined by armed groups, local communities, and state representatives. Experiences made in extending state authority and promoting governance formation in various contexts can inspire parties to explore different options.

### Governance Building Processes

In extremely fragile contexts, the central state's governance capacity is limited, and state institutions may be absent from parts of the state's territory. Certain functions and services usually provided by state institutions are

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<sup>157</sup> A UN study on local mediation processes concluded that in the CAR, the ability of local armed groups to defect "gives them significant destabilizing power over national actors and processes." United Nations Mediation Support Unit, Policy and Mediation Division, "UN Support to Local Mediation: Challenges and Opportunities," *UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs*, 17.11.2020, p.20, available at [peacemaker.un.org/node/3612](http://peacemaker.un.org/node/3612).

therefore carried out by communities and armed groups. Where the absence of the state has led to the marginalization of entire populations, the state's dysfunctionality may be as responsible for a conflict situation as external support to armed groups.<sup>158</sup> Where the goal is to return the monopoly of force to the state, it is necessary to work with this reality.

Different ways of extending state authority and improving the provision of services to communities have been tried in UN peace operations.<sup>159</sup> These initiatives are usually either based on a top-down or on a bottom-up model. The top-down model is often used when missions are mandated by the Security Council to support the extension of state authority. These types of initiatives – for example, supported in the CAR and Mali – have focused on local- and regional-level state officials for the provinces, including their recruitment, deployment, and training.<sup>160</sup> Such initiatives have been hampered by the reluctance of individuals appointed by the central government to accept or deploy to a post in an armed group controlled area; and the refusal by the local community or armed groups to cooperate with the officials.<sup>161</sup> As local populations have only limited or even no experience with the state as service provider, the presence of a state official is often met with distrust. Even after several years of attempts to extend state authority through this model in Mali, only nine per cent of civil administrators were deployed to Northern Mali by the end of 2020, six years after the UN Mission had received its mandate from the Security Council.<sup>162</sup> In the CAR, some offices of state officials were destroyed in protests against their deployment (see above, chapter three).

The bottom-up model is represented by CVR projects, reviewed in the second chapter. These are designed to address the challenges in a given community specifically. Research conducted by Brown/Zahar in the CAR

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158 Abdi/Mason, *Mediation and Governance in Fragile Contexts*, pp. 64–65.

159 Contrary to what we are proposing here, these initiatives have been taking place under the state-centric peacebuilding paradigm, in parallel to DDR and CVR.

160 While in principle, the concept of the extension of state authority has three components – presence, capacity, and legitimacy – UN peacekeeping operations have found it challenging to go beyond the first two when they were deployed to environments where there was “no peace to keep.” United Nations Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support et al, *Presence, Capacity and Legitimacy: Implementing Extension of State Authority Mandates in Peacekeeping*, (Nairobi: United Nations, 2017), pp. 8, 11.

161 Interview with UN official, New York, 17 December 2018.

162 “As of 30 November 2020, nine per cent of civil administrators in northern Mali and Mopti region were physically deployed to their duty stations, the lowest figure since September 2015 or earlier.” UN Secretary-General, “Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary-General,” *UN*, 28.12.2020, p. 7 (para. 41), available at [digitallibrary.un.org/record/3896411](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3896411).

has shown that a community-based reduction of violence alone is often fragile and temporary in nature, as “vertical linkages” from the community to the central state are neglected.<sup>163</sup> In other words, bottom-up approaches may lack the sustainability needed to make peace agreements work.

What is needed, therefore, is support for governance formation on the local-level from both directions: from the bottom up, from the top-down, and from the center towards the periphery, as well as from the periphery towards the center. Where the goal is to bring the state back into armed group-controlled territory, such a conceptual approach is likely to work best if anchored in local-level structures.

## Local Governance Structures

Aligning the central state with local governance structures has been tried in a number of contexts by using hybrid state-customary structures. These have been shown to be effective in Somaliland, for example.<sup>164</sup> Such structures were also negotiated between armed groups and the central state in the CAR and Mali, where they were used to form special mixed units that were mandated to exercise police functions. This approach can also be used to deliver services other than security, such as health. The goal here is to create a temporary structure, such as a local committee, in areas under the control of armed groups, within which representatives of all three types of actors – armed groups, the central state, and communities – work together and become jointly responsible for delivering services to the population. Often this

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163 Research conducted by Brown and Zahar shows that “vertical linkages” are often neglected in the design of community-based programs. In one of the cases analyzed by the authors – IOM’s community stabilization projects in the CAR, projects that are almost identical in design as CVR – the focus on social cohesion at the community level meant that relations between the community and the state were left aside. This made the projects “divorced from a broader social contract between the state and society,” causing a lack of sustainability in the results achieved. Brown/Zahar, *Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic*, p. 19–21.

164 In Somali-led peace processes, an agreement signed between armed groups and the central state provided for local committees to be set up across Somaliland that would build the capacity of local authorities and facilitate dialogue. Community leaders took weapons out of the ongoing conflict system and put them at the service of the local authorities. There was an implicit understanding that communities could withdraw the weapons if local authorities violated the agreements. This not only reduced the number of weapons in circulation where this was introduced, but it also put the weapons at the service of communal safety and generated confidence in the peace agreement. For more on this, see: Pat Johnson, “The Search for Peace: Lessons from Somali-led Peace Processes 1991–2007,” in: Andrea Ricci (ed.) *Making the Difference? What Works in Response to Crises and Security Threats – The Debate Continues*, (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2009), pp. 257–261.

will only be possible if some form of reducing or managing violence has been agreed to between the state and the armed groups.<sup>165</sup>

The mandate and composition of these hybrid state / non-state structures is dependent on the situation in a local area and may vary from one community to the next. Where local committees exist in a community, these may evolve into hybrid governance structures. Keeping the experience of local committees established as part of CVR programs in mind, we want to highlight the importance of carefully reflecting on the mandate of the structures and to ensure that their experiences can be fed into national-level peace talks.<sup>166</sup>

The mandate of such hybrid structures ideally focuses on the provision of services, including security, administration, health, and education. To ensure that a relationship of trust can develop in a tense conflict environment, it is important to build in a local dialogue or mediation function.<sup>167</sup> For instance, with security being a priority need of communities, efforts could include the formation of special mixed police units, as have been established as a part of the peace processes in the CAR and Mali for example.<sup>168</sup>

Local dialogues and peacebuilding processes could also be linked to national-level peace talks and reform processes through a reporting mechanism that provides effective access to local representatives. The exact format of such a mechanism depends on the context and phase of the peace process one is in (see below). What is important is that the grievances of local populations, including members of armed groups, are adequately heard and addressed at the national-level and that their dialogue and peacebuilding efforts are valued. How effectively this is done will strongly impact local populations' trust in the peace process. This in turn increases the chances for

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165 Abdi/Mason, *Mediation and Governance in Fragile Contexts*, pp. 45–62.

166 It is important to note that a purely localized approach to peacemaking – e.g., through the conclusion of local peace agreements – has proven to lack sustainability: While there may be an end to fighting in one area of the country, fighting may break out in another area and produce a spillover effect. Therefore, national-level processes remain key in peacemaking.

167 For experiences of CVR project committees with local dialogues, see chapter one (community violence reduction). For local mediation initiatives in contexts with a UN presence, see: United Nations Mediation Support Unit, Policy and Mediation Division, *UN Support to Local Mediation*.

168 Where the committee enjoys the full trust of the community, as was the case in some communities as part of CVR projects in the CAR, it can even address violent conflict that may emerge within the community through dialogue, using local customary approaches. As Abdi and Mason describe in their SMALL framework for mediation and governance in fragile contexts, a vacuum of effective governance can be an opportunity for mediation, if this vacuum is filled with a space for negotiations. Abdi/Mason, *Mediation and Governance in Fragile Contexts*, p. 10.

members of armed groups to disarm, should a national-level peace agreement be reached.

In light of the fragile political and security situation that local governance structures may operate in, their set-up needs to be based on and guided by an ongoing conflict analysis. In addition to areas frequently covered by such analysis processes, a focus on governance capacity, security, and armed groups' interests is useful. Initial conflict analysis that can guide parties in defining the mandate of local committees could include the questions presented in figure 4.

Figure 4: Selected Focus Areas for Conflict Analysis<sup>169</sup>

Focus Area	Key Questions
<b>Governance</b>	<p>What is the degree of governance capacity of central state institutions and local customary governance structures? How effective and legitimate are they in the eyes of the population? Who is currently delivering what types of services to communities?</p> <p>Who provides security to whom?</p> <p>How long will it take until central state institutions can deliver services to the provinces?</p>
<b>Security</b>	<p>Who are security providers in the given context? What are the potential security threats to peacebuilding in the various areas under the control of armed groups?</p> <p>What can realistically be achieved in these areas?</p> <p>How can risks be managed?</p>
<b>Actors' interests</b>	<p>What grievances that are linked to the root causes of conflict are shared by armed groups and communities?</p> <p>What opportunities do community leaders, religious groups, women groups, youth groups etc. see for bringing local and national actors together?</p>

When deciding on the composition of the structures, one of the key guiding principles should be that the members enjoy the trust of the communities. Based on experiences in the CAR and Somalia, types of actors that may be involved in such committees include local traditional leaders, key community figures such as leaders of women's organizations, members of armed

<sup>169</sup> This list is by no means exhaustive. More key questions, in particular in regards to actors' interests, can be found in chapter three.

groups, and representatives of the central state (e.g., civil servants). The inclusivity and transparency of the negotiations leading up to the formation of such a local governance structure will likely shape the degree to which representatives of the central state will be accepted by the community as part of the structure.

## Integrating Governance Building Initiatives into the Peace Process

Processes that change an armed group's *status quo*, like DDR or CVR, need to be negotiated with them. In places where the central state has been absent for years or decades, initiatives that are not negotiated with armed groups and communities cannot be effectively implemented.<sup>170</sup> Without armed groups, the antagonistic relations that have led to the conflict cannot be transformed into peaceful ones. Further, such peaceful relations are a key condition to their disarmament.<sup>171</sup>

When and how to negotiate the launch and implementation of local governance building initiatives depends on the context and phase of the peace process one is in. The following scenarios provide examples of what this can consist of and potential ways forward.

### **Scenario 1: There is no peace agreement in place and mediation efforts have not started yet.**

The launch of a new mediation process presents an opportunity to adapt the process to the specific characteristics of the extremely fragile context concerned. Armed groups and communities can be brought in from the outset and play a role in setting the objective and agenda for the talks.

The content of the talks could move away from a focus on central state and institution building and integrate the concept of hybrid governance building into the issues to be discussed. One way to do this could be with a

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170 Bringing armed group and community representatives into peace talks is often considered challenging by political actors. Identifying representatives and building their capacity to negotiate may take time and lead to delays in the talks. At the same time, capacity building already constitutes a constructive engagement that helps to build trust in the peace process and moves the focus of armed group members away from fighting.

171 Andreas Hirblinger, Dana Landau, "Frauen an den Verhandlungstisch? Ja, aber nicht als Pflichtübung", *PeaceLab*, 04.05.2020, available at [peacelab.blog/2020/05/frauen-an-den-verhandlungstisch-ja-aber-nicht-als-pflichtuebung](https://peacelab.blog/2020/05/frauen-an-den-verhandlungstisch-ja-aber-nicht-als-pflichtuebung).

phased approach. In phase one, the parties would focus on negotiating and implementing hybrid governance building initiatives across the country. The goal would be to prepare the context for a more comprehensive state and institution building process where armed groups would be requested to disarm.<sup>172</sup> In phase two, negotiations could work towards agreeing on elections and the establishment of the monopoly of force by the state (DDR). These would build on the outcomes of the hybrid governance initiatives achieved in phase one.<sup>173</sup>

The set-up of a reporting mechanism and the provision of space for local-level actors to share their grievances can go far in linking local-level dialogues and processes to national-level talks. One approach could be for representatives of local committees to attend the national-level peace talks. This could facilitate the access of national-level delegates and third parties' to information about developments on the ground. Such locally rooted information can help to clarify challenges and necessary steps in the peace process.

### **Scenario 2: A track one mediation process is ongoing, but no agreement has been signed yet.**

If a track one mediation process has already been set up and the objective has been defined in line with a traditional state-centric focus, there are still opportunities to bring new actors and issues into the process when an agreement has not yet been reached.

When talks with political actors have already progressed, it is unlikely that a phased approach, like in scenario one, can be implemented. In some cases, there may be a possibility to introduce hybrid governance initiatives into security negotiations. For instance, examples of good practices could be shared with the parties that highlight the importance of preceding the launch of traditional DDR programs with a process of local-level governance building. The linkages between armed groups and communities could also be highlighted and discussed.

The vertical linkage between local governance building and national-level processes could be integrated into the design of the national-level

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172 Discussions at the UN level on how to link local- and national-level processes have included the idea that "local level processes could be seen as preparing the ground for the implementation of a national deal." United Nations Mediation Support Unit, Policy and Mediation Division, *UN Support to Local Mediation*, p.13.

173 In internationalized armed conflicts or proxy wars such as Libya, an additional track would need to address the conflicting interests of external actors supporting the conflict parties.

monitoring committee.<sup>174</sup> These committees could have the mandate to monitor the sequencing of governance building initiatives and DDR. A subcommittee could be formed where the representatives of local committees report on progress, discuss challenges, and give recommendations to the monitoring committee. This could include recommendations on outstanding grievances to be addressed and the timing for the launch of the DDR program.

### **Scenario 3: An agreement has been signed and brokered through a track one process, but implementation is delayed or has proven challenging.**

The way forward in this scenario will depend on the structures that have been set up to monitor and follow-up on the implementation of the agreement. Where a monitoring committee has the mandate to propose new measures that would facilitate the implementation process, they could propose the implementation of governance building initiatives to pave the way for a DDR program. These initiatives need to be negotiated with armed groups, communities, and the central state. They also require the identification of a format for the negotiations. If armed groups and communities were marginalized in the talks that led to the adoption of an agreement and they have not been part of the monitoring committee, their inclusion in the committee could be considered, as could the creation of a new (sub-)committee.

In this scenario, the creation of the vertical linkages between local committees and national-level processes is extremely challenging and will depend on the structures that have already been established. The support of external actors may be needed to ensure that what is happening at the local level is reported and analyzed by the national-level monitoring committee. In countries with a UN peace operation, the mission could support local communities in gaining access to the national-level process.<sup>175</sup>

If the monitoring committee's mandate makes it unlikely that it could provide a forum for the negotiation of governance building initiatives and the commitment to the negotiated agreement is low, the parties may decide to design a new process or track. In this case, there could be an opportunity to use a set-up similar to the one described in scenario one.

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174 The term "monitoring committee" here stands for any committee that is set up and mandated to monitor and advise on the implementation of a negotiated agreement. Different terms are used across various contexts (e.g., follow-up committee).

175 Boutellis, Mechoulan and Zahar have analysed the UN's comparative advantages in linking national-level to local-level mediation processes. They highlight the need for the UN to strengthen its internal coherence in this regard, particularly in peace operations contexts. *Parallel Tracks or Connected Pieces*, p.24.



## Support to Implementation

In light of the extraordinary challenges that extremely fragile contexts face, many of them are likely to need external support in the negotiation and implementation of governance building initiatives. Support should, however, only be provided if requested by local partners. National partners may need support for financing local governance structures and the deployment of peacebuilders and mediators. Support may also be needed to build the capacity of community and armed group representatives for their participation in peace talks.<sup>176</sup>

Donors who finance mediation processes, CVR, DDR, and SSR programs should keep in mind that governance building initiatives are meant to enable a more effective implementation of processes they already invest in. The result of this is to decrease the costs that occur when these processes turn out to be ineffective or gains are lost when violence re-escalates. However, governance building initiatives as presented here are not a ready-to-use program. Rather, they present a conceptual approach that is meant to encourage a policy dialogue among stakeholders interested in designing more context-specific peace negotiations and implementation processes.

## Conclusion

The complex relationships of the actors involved in some of today's most violent conflicts call for new approaches to peacemaking that move beyond non-contextualized standard practices. DDR programs play a key role in peace processes – they are meant to create a safe and secure environment and prevent armed groups from engaging in renewed hostilities, after the negotiation of an end to the conflict.

Today, agreements that use non-contextualized approaches on a track one level rarely succeed in ending armed conflict, especially in extremely fragile contexts like the CAR and Libya. This means that such countries never move on to the post-conflict phase. Agreements that are signed lack sustainability. Often only a few months into attempts at implementation, violence escalates. One of the key reasons for the fragility of these agreements

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<sup>176</sup> Where the UN has a field presence and is supporting local mediation or CVR initiatives, existing local committees can be entry points or platforms for governance building initiatives.

is that the processes leading up to their signature and their contents, are disconnected from the power and military balance on the ground. All too often they fail to recognize or reflect the role of non-state actors in these processes, especially those of armed groups and local communities. The inclusion of DDR is a good example of this disconnect: An agreement may include provisions requesting that armed groups disarm by enrolling in a DDR program, yet these groups may not have been sufficiently included in shaping the agreement and the complex relationships they have with political actors and local communities are not accurately reflected. Thus, they will refuse to disarm.

When violence re-escalates because armed groups and their external backers don't feel bound by the agreements, calls for the negotiation of new agreements emerge, sometimes coming from external actors with stakes in the process. This leads to a proliferation of mediation initiatives that increasingly undermines the international community's credibility as a mediator and peacebuilder. It is therefore essential to rethink the roles of armed groups, communities, state institutions and third parties in these processes.

The experience of UN peace operations analyzed in this paper shows what happens when attempts are made to implement agreements that do not adequately reflect the roles of armed groups in an extremely fragile context: This not only leads to a failure of DDR processes but it also harms the peace process. The need to rethink the role of armed groups and how to engage with them therefore starts from the very first moments of conflict analysis. Such an analysis guides constructive engagement with armed groups and continues throughout the different phases of a peace process. Different third parties – including mediators, UN member states, peacebuilders, and peacekeepers – will be involved in both analysis and engaging with the state, armed groups, and communities. Third parties may be involved at different points of a process, yet they each have a responsibility to make peace agreements more sustainable and locally legitimate.

Three levels of engagement require particular attention from third parties who are supporting mediation, peacebuilding and peacekeeping processes: the negotiation phase, the content of peace agreements, and the implementation phase.

- *Negotiation phase:* Working towards sufficiently inclusive participation in peace negotiations benefits from carefully considering the power and conflict dynamic on the ground. In-depth and ongoing conflict analysis is

likely to help third parties and conflict parties better assess what steps and how long it will take for the central state to develop legitimate and effective governance across its territory and to establish the monopoly of force. Such reflections can inform process design, including who to approach and who to seek to involve in the negotiation process. If negotiations are to lead to locally legitimate and sustainable agreements, they need to address the legitimate grievances of armed groups and communities and avoid the use of non-contextualized state-centric approaches.

- *Content of a peace agreement:* If the content of the agreement does not take into consideration the power and military balance on the ground, it is unlikely to last. Where the state does not have the capacity to recover or establish the monopoly of force in the near future, negotiated governance building initiatives could be considered. This may help to bring armed groups and communities into the peace and governance formation processes and allow the state to develop legitimate and effective governance structures across its territory in the short to medium term. These efforts may be anchored in a peace agreement, or may precede, support, or follow a more narrowly defined agreement, thereby possibly preparing for more long-term traditional DDR.
- *Implementation phase:* In all phases, and especially during the implementation phase, close coordination among all actors is key to ensure that the complex layers of processes are sequenced in a conflict-sensitive manner. This is especially important for DDR and other programs that involve members of armed groups, as such programs change the *status quo* of key actors on the ground. Effective and transparent reporting mechanisms that link local-level with national-level processes allow for adaptive implementation. Ongoing and focused conflict analysis is key to inform the work of all stakeholders involved.

Changing the way peace processes are designed and implemented requires building a common vision and understanding among a variety of actors with sometimes diverging interests. People affected by ongoing violence in countries deserve that we recognize the limits of our current approaches and explore new ways forward.

**CSS Mediation Resources** is a series that aims to provide methodological guidance and insights to mediators, negotiators and peace practitioners working to address violent political conflicts. It is produced by the Mediation Support Team of the Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich, with contributions from occasional guest authors. Previous issues include:

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The lessons in this publication should be read by and should inspire reflections among peace and security practitioners dealing with conflicts where there is a need to manage the fighting forces and implement DDR programs. Their efforts will only be the stronger for it and any agreement reached more likely to succeed. *Simon Yazgi, Senior Researcher, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research*

This book provides valuable insights on how to engage armed groups in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements, based on first-hand experiences from Libya and Central African Republic. In an era of increasingly complex conflicts with a growing number of armed groups and proxy forces, Silke Rusch offers timely guidance to mediators and peacebuilders by offering concrete and actionable recommendations on how to advance a tailored and linked multitrack approach to DDR and CVR in peace processes. A compelling and important read for both practitioners and academics, as well as anyone interested in the field of peace and security.

*Sylvia R. Thompson, Senior Manager, CMI – Martti Ahtisaari's Peace Foundation*

This is a thoroughly researched and well-argued analysis of one of the core challenges towards post-conflict peacebuilding. By examining the negotiation and implementation processes of DDR provisions, Silke Rusch offers not only a very timely piece of policy-oriented scholarship, but also addresses an important knowledge gap in the literature on DDR and peace processes, combining wide-ranging insights from practitioners with a nuanced, innovative and lucid analysis. This report will be of interest to practitioners, as well as scholars and students of peacebuilding mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding processes. *Joachim A. Koops, Professor of Security Studies and Director, Institute of Security and Global Affairs, Leiden University and Member of the Board, Global Governance Institute, Brussels*